

CHURCH AND WORLD:  
THE LOSS OF DISTINCTION IN  
TWENTIETH CENTURY THEOLOGY

by  
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A THESIS  
PRESENTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF DIVINITY  
  
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH  
1980



# ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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Title of Thesis ..... Church and World: The Loss of Distinction in .....

..... Twentieth Century Theology .....

I. In twentieth century Protestant theology there has been a loss of ontological distinction between the Church and the world. By this is meant a distinction in being, in essence. That this is so is demonstrated by an analysis of four major theologians.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, holding that reality is restructured in Christ, the Incarnate One, raised the question about his concrete place in the world. By following out the implications of his Lutheran incarnationism, he in the end answered that the whole world is the place of restructured reality. The result is a dissolution of the sacred-profane distinction. God has fully entered the reality of this world, and this world fully participates in the reality of God. Paul Tillich sought to protect the radical otherness of God. By defining God as 'being-itself,' however, he ironically was left with a thorough-going immanentism. His ontology swept away the distinctions between God and humanity, faith and disbelief, the Church and the world. Wolfhart Pannenberg's concern is for wholeness. In Christ, we learn that God is the power of the future. This means that the future is both the beginning and the end: all things flow out of the future, and toward it, in an unbroken circle of historical events. Thus, Pannenberg has little room for sin and its consequent brokenness. Jürgen Moltmann extrapolates knowledge of the eschaton from the 'inner tendency' of the Christ event. The Cross teaches that God has taken all death into his being, and the resurrection reveals that God lives for all and will grant universal life. He contends for the eschatological determination of essence; and thus, since all reality will automatically share a common future, we are left with the implication that all present reality has the same being.

II. Therefore, with Bonhoeffer and Tillich the problem to be encountered is that of immanentism, and with Pannenberg and Moltmann, universalism.

The idea of the Holy offers a way to understand the proper relation between God and the world in sin, and therefore also the relation between the Church and the world. The holiness of God refers to his absolute distinction from all else. Yet, inasmuch as the content of his being is revealed in Jesus Christ, his otherness is revealed as precisely the overcoming of the distance between himself and sinful humanity. His holiness is the uniqueness of his love in Jesus Christ. Therefore, God radically transcends the world through the grace of his love for the world.

The Church is holy because God is holy. Constituted in Christ, it has its being through the free act of holiness. Since it has this in grace, it confesses the fact of sin, and will not count on an automatic, universal salvation, nor will it look to an abstractly idealized future, but only to Christ, trusting the freedom of his grace. And the Church is holy as God is holy. Participating in the being of Christ, it is holy in that it is ontologically distinct from the world in its love and self-giving for the world.

Karl Barth's theology provides a model which adequately accounts for the notion of holiness. Structured around the fact of God's revelation in Christ, it is trinitarian throughout: God the Father speaks his Word in Christ the Son, and through the Holy Spirit empowers subjective human response. The Church for Barth is set apart from the world as the community of those who hear and gratefully respond to the reconciliation of God in Christ.

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To Karen

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## Acknowledgements

The production of this thesis was certainly no solo performance. Many others gave generously of themselves to assist me in this project, and for them I am deeply grateful. The Revd. Dr. Alan Lewis has been from the beginning an able supervisor, patient with my weaknesses and supportive of my strengths. He has provided much needed guidance in the process of academic research, been a stimulating partner in theological dialogue, and offered me the treasured gift of friendship. The Revd. Dr. Alasdair Heron has also been a very helpful advisor in this theological endeavour. His encouragement has given me confidence, even as his apt suggestions have improved my text. I am thankful to have had the opportunity to work with these two theologians who care deeply, not only for the subject of theology but also for the object of its study.

Two others have had a hand in the preparation of this work. Elspeth Leishman's typing skills are responsible for this manuscript's present form. She has always been cheerfully ready to decipher incomprehensible handwriting, all the while gracefully bearing the pressures of time. Recognition must likewise be given to Kay Lewis. Her proof-reading was of great help: the pair of British eyes she brought to that task caught many an unacceptable 'Americanism' that had slipped by my word-weary eyes.

Many others have had an indirect involvement in this study. I refer to my family and friends who have supported me both financially and in prayer. I feel an inexpressible debt of gratitude for their love and sacrifice.

Finally, my acknowledgements would be incomplete without reference to my wife and two daughters. Their participation with me made this 'Scottish adventure' a very happy experience indeed. Jennifer and Joy have been understanding of the long hours their 'daddy' has had to spend at his desk, and they have, through their gaiety of spirit, provided the sunshine which more than occasionally was needed to clear the dark mists of intellectual struggle. My deepest gratitude, however, is reserved for Karen. Without her love, companionship, quiet confidence, ready sacrifices, and efficient management of the routines of daily living, the work of this thesis would not have been possible. For this reason, I gladly dedicate this volume to her.

## Introduction

According to John's Gospel, the evening before Jesus' death was an intimate time of communion for Jesus and his little band of followers. Just prior to Judas' betrayal, the arrest, and all the horror of the crucifixion that followed, Jesus interceded with the Father on behalf of his disciples. This high-priestly prayer is made poignant by its place in the calm before the storm in which all heaven and hell breaks loose in the final, eternal conflict between the love of God and the forces of evil. In a dramatic silence, pregnant with the soul deafening sounds of the march of history nearing its climax, Jesus opened the chambers of his heart and invited his friends into his secret closet of prayer. What was his concern in that high and holy hour? His thought was for his disciples and their relationship with the world:

I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth. As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. <sup>1</sup>

Jesus' prayer was not that his disciples would be taken out of the world, for he had sent them into the world. His prayer was that they would be preserved from the evil one, because they are not of the world. The disciples' situation: in the world,

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<sup>1</sup> John 17:15-18. All biblical references quoted in this thesis will be from the Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.



but not of the world; plunged into a river of human events in which they must forever swim against the current; commissioned as Christ's ambassadors in a foreign land.

From that time on, the followers of Christ have been faced with the constantly contemporary problem of how best to understand, and live according to, their proper relationship with the world. If at times the Church has perhaps been too isolated from the world, voices have been raised calling the Church back into the world; and if the Church has at other times been allied too closely with the world, others have sounded forth the summons for the Church to return to its true distinctiveness.

This thesis is concerned with this Church-world relationship; specifically, with the nature of the distinction between them. In Part I, I will argue that there has been, in twentieth century Protestant theology, a loss of ontological distinction between the Church and the world, and in Part II, I will suggest a re-examination of the biblical concept of holiness - God's and the Church's - and contend, on the basis of it, that the tendency to dissolve the ontological differences between the Church and the world is unacceptable.

What does the phrase 'ontological distinction' denote? By this I mean a distinction in being, in fundamental essence. My concern is not with the more obvious differences: that the Church gathers to worship, is nourished by the Word and Sacraments, lives charitably in the world, is true enough and certainly

important, but not the central issue for this thesis. Nor does my interest lie in the uniqueness of the inner subjectivity of the Church, whether from the viewpoint of the experiences of individual members or its collective self-consciousness. This study, rather, intends to point to an objective difference in essence between the Church and the world.

My argument is two-pronged. First, I will contend that modern Protestant theology has tended to minimize an important distinction in being between the People of God and those who are not the People of God. To demonstrate this, I will call upon the theologies of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Paul Tillich, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Jürgen Moltmann. I am only secondarily concerned about what these theologians have written directly about the Church; of far greater importance are their theological formulations as a whole. While these have not necessarily aimed to minimize the ontological distinction between the Church and the world, such has been, in my judgment, their indirect consequence. Therefore, I will attempt to outline with broad strokes the basic structure of each of these theologies, and as the shapes and contours emerge, show the implications of each for the Church-world relationship.

Secondly, by underscoring the biblical notion of holiness, I will seek to demonstrate how problematical this tendency is in recent theology. It is my conviction that the Church is objectively rooted, through faith, in a Being distinct from the world; that is, it is grounded in the God of holiness. In fellowship with him,

through Jesus Christ and in the power of his Spirit, the Church itself is made holy, objectively distinct from the world. My theological ally at this point will be Karl Barth.<sup>2</sup>

The aim of the second part of this thesis is not to provide solutions for all the theological problems raised in the first part; space alone renders this an impossibility. And neither is it my desire to set up Barth as the final authority on all the theological questions of this century. Rather, I hope to show, at very least, that the tendency to minimize the ontological distinction between the Church and the world is problematical, and also to offer - if only in a basic and brief way - an approach to the Church-world relationship which sacrifices neither the Church's distinction from the world, nor its relevance in the world. Karl Barth is called upon as a friendly witness whose ideas support my position because of the unavoidable fact of his powerful presence in this century's debates, and because it would be foolhardy to neglect such help when it is available.

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2 It is perhaps worth noting that in the original outline of this thesis I had intended to criticize Barth along with the others in Part I, basing my position on the rather standard arguments that he is an a-historical universalist. However, after months of being submerged in Barth's works, I came to the conclusion that I was wrong, as also were his critics. I discovered that while Barth may not be free from all criticism (what theologian is?), he is nevertheless innocent of the charges I was making against him. Thus he became an ally rather than a foe.

In any theological journey, many interesting problems emerge that seem to plead for further elucidation. The little back alleys may easily be ignored, but only with difficulty can one get across the broad thoroughfares that intersect one's way - the important theological questions that emerge and threaten to halt all progress until they are answered. Given the necessary breadth of this study, we will be particularly vulnerable to this problem. But as I have tried to write with a destination in mind, so the reader would be well advised to keep constantly before him (or her) the central questions: Has modern theology lost the ontological distinction between the Church and the world? If so, is this acceptable in light of the biblical notion of holiness? If our journey will not be straight, but often wind tortuously through the nuances and implications of very complex theological systems, I am convinced that we shall nevertheless eventually reach the destination where these questions are answered.

A final word about the raison d'être of this study. The driving motivation behind this thesis is not to point out proudly how superior the Church is when compared with the world; it is not my concern to hoist the Church up to a new level of irrelevant arrogance. The motivation derives from a missionary concern: How is the Church to understand itself in relation to the world? This is a question with enormous implications for the praxis of faith. If there is really no essential difference between the Church and the world, then that will bear significantly on the

Church's manner of life and work. If, on the other hand, there is a difference, then that, too, will entail certain practical consequences.

What is most obviously at issue in this matter is the Church's task of evangelism. If there is no ultimate distinction between the Church and the world, then will not the Lord's admonition to 'make disciples of all nations' lose its imperative - perhaps even fade out of the collective consciousness of the Church as a piece of time-bound rhetoric lacking final necessity? If in the end the being of those who confess faith in Jesus Christ is identical with the being of those who do not, can the summons to personal metanoia and commitment honestly retain any sort of urgency, let alone the driving motivation that through the centuries has thrust out into the world witnesses who not only proclaimed a cross, but bore a cross of untold sufferings and deprivations? If there is no real difference between the Church and the world, then perhaps the Church may seek to love and affirm, the world, but will there be any reason for it to call men and women to become, through faith in Christ, a part of the People of God?

It is beyond the scope of this study to deal directly with these practical ramifications. This is a study in systematic theology, limited by time, space, and academic considerations. The a priori assumption, however, is that it is a question of fundamental - even crucial - importance for the daily on-going

life of the Church. The terminus a quo of this thesis is the question, Does it really make any essential difference whether one is a part of Christ's Church? The terminus ad quem is the answer, Yes! In between, the intellectual labour of supporting this answer by demonstrating that, contrary to much contemporary theology, there is an ontological distinction between the Church and the world.



PART ONE

## THE LOSS OF DISTINCTION FROM BELOW:

INCARNATION AND REALITY IN THE  
THEOLOGY OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

At that moment they caught sight of some thirty or forty windmills, which stand on that plain, and as soon as Don Quixote saw them he said to his squire: 'Fortune is guiding our affairs better than we could have wished. Look over there, friend Sancho Panza, where more than thirty monstrous giants appear. I intend to do battle with them and take all their lives. With their spoils we will begin to get rich, for this is a fair war, and it is a great service to God to wipe such a wicked brood from the face of the earth.'

'What giants?' asked Sancho Panza.

'Those you see over there,' replied his master, 'with their long arms. Some giants have them six miles long.'

'Take care, your worship,' said Sancho; 'those things over there are not giants but windmills, and what seems to be their arms are their sails, which are whirled round in the wind and make the millstone turn.' 1

It may seem odd to begin a chapter on Dietrich Bonhoeffer with a quote from THE ADVENTURES OF DON QUIXOTE. What does a seventeenth century madman have to do with a twentieth century theologian? How is 'The Knight of The Sad Countenance,' girded with rusty armour astride his gaunt steed, battling giants of his imagination, related to the young man whose life and death has so deeply influenced modern theology? The answer is that Bonhoeffer laboured through his varied ministries to distinguish between windmills and giants, and to forge new weapons for his age to replace the rusty swords of earlier

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1 Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, THE ADVENTURES OF DON QUIXOTE, trans. J. M. Cohen (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1950), p.68.

battles.<sup>2</sup> In a word, Bonhoeffer sought to comprehend reality.

The life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer is as fascinating as a dramatic novel. Consider: a brilliant young student of theology, reared in an upper-middle class German home with all the cultural advantages of the bourgeois, establishes a solid academic reputation, pastors for a time in Barcelona and London, travels widely on behalf of the ecumenical movement, studies and lectures in the United States, directs an underground seminary, struggles to maintain the integrity of his Church torn asunder by the compromising temptations of National Socialism, joins in active resistance against Hitler, and finally is hanged as a conspirator in the last days of the War.<sup>3</sup> It is no wonder Kenneth Hamilton wrote: 'It is the life as much as the thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer that has caught the imagination of men of our age and made

2 'Here is the immortal figure of Don Quixote, the knight of the doleful countenance, who takes a miserable hack for a charger and who rides into endless battles for the love of a lady who does not exist. That is how it looks when an old world ventures to take up arms against a new one and when a world of the past hazards an attack against the superior forces of the commonplace and mean . . . . Our business now is to replace our rusty swords with sharp ones.' Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ETHICS, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Neville Horton Smith (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1955), pp.49-50.

3 The most comprehensive biography of Bonhoeffer is Eberhard Bethge, DIETRICH BONHOEFFER - THEOLOGIAN, CHRISTIAN, CONTEMPORARY, ed. Edwin Robertson, trans. Eric Mosbacher et. al. (London: Collins, 1970). All students of Bonhoeffer are indebted to his close friend's painstakingly thorough work. For a more popular approach, see Mary Bosanquet, BONHOEFFER - TRUE PATRIOT (Oxford: H. R. Mowbray & Co. Ltd., 1968). At least one fictionalized account inspired by his life has been published: Donald Goddard, THE LAST DAYS OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).

him so central a figure in the contemporary theological scene.'<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, as interesting as his tragically short life may be in itself, it is his theological thought that is his great legacy to us.<sup>5</sup> When Bonhoeffer was hanged to death at the age of thirty-nine, early in the morning on 9th April 1945, in the concentration camp at Flossenbürg,<sup>6</sup> his ideas were affirmed by the final witness - martyrdom. This, of course, does not guarantee the validity of his theology, but it does indicate a life of rare integrity and consistency. What might have remained abstract in his convictions was given faithful, concrete expression in costly action, even to the end. This becomes for us a compelling invitation to listen carefully and critically to his theology.

And what we have discovered is

a theologian whose thought is as christocentric as that of Karl Barth, who raised the question of the communication of the gospel as sharply as Rudolf Bultmann, who was led to take the problems of our pragmatic, problem-solving, technological world as seriously as Reinhold Niebuhr, but who, more than any of these men, thought from the perspective of the concrete church. <sup>7</sup>

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4 Kenneth Hamilton, LIFE IN ONE'S STRIDE - A SHORT STUDY IN DIETRICH BONHOEFFER (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1968), p.9.

5 'Younger European and American Christian thinkers often seem to be divided into two camps: those who acknowledge their debt to Bonhoeffer and those who are indebted but who obscure the traces of their source..' Martin E. Marty, 'Introduction: Problems and Possibilities in Bonhoeffer's Thought,' in THE PLACE OF BONHOEFFER - PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES IN HIS THOUGHT, ed. Martin E. Marty (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1962), p.10.

6 Bethge, DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, p.830.

7 John D. Godsey, THE THEOLOGY OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1960), p.17.

But the valuable ore of his witness to the gospel has not been mined from his writings without difficulty. The last twenty years have witnessed many interpreters<sup>8</sup> wrestling with the difficulties of understanding a thinker who wrote in a variety of ways, frequently amidst turbulent events. His works range from THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS, his scholarly doctoral dissertation written at the age of twenty-one, to his LETTERS AND PAPERS FROM PRISON, which contain fragmentary ideas of a probing, visionary, non-systematic nature. Unfortunately,

the greater share of the literature on Bonhoeffer tugs on these fragments sticking up out of the rubble of his thought hoping to unearth a whole body, or at least an arm or leg to graft on to their own dismembered theology. Their attempts have not been all that encouraging. 9

The two theologians generally credited with the present interest in Bonhoeffer, John A. T. Robinson and Paul van Buren,<sup>10</sup> are guilty of

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8 For survey of the trends in Bonhoeffer studies, see Eberhard Bethge, BONHOEFFER - EXILE AND MARTYR, ed. John W. De Gruchy (London: Collins, 1975), pp.23-25, and André Dumas, DIETRICH BONHOEFFER - THEOLOGIAN OF REALITY, trans. Robert McAfee Brown (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1971), pp.236-80.

9 Ray S. Anderson, HISTORICAL TRANSCENDENCE AND THE REALITY OF GOD (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1975), p.73.

10 'In 1963 two books appeared which have radically transformed the whole theological scene. I refer of course to the Bishop of Woolwich's HONEST TO GOD and to Paul van Buren's THE SECULAR MEANING OF THE GOSPEL. Each of these works appealed to Bonhoeffer and in so doing put him on the map, at least, in the (English-speaking) world of theology and church - and indeed beyond' (Reginald Fuller in 'Introduction' to Jürgen Moltmann and Jürgen Weissbach, TWO STUDIES IN THE THEOLOGY OF BONHOEFFER, trans. Reginald H. & Ilse Fuller (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), p.12). See also Bethge, BONHOEFFER - EXILE AND MARTYR, p.24, and Kenneth Hamilton, REVOLT AGAINST HEAVEN - AN ENQUIRY INTO ANTI-SUPERNATURALISM (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1965), p.169.

just such a selective approach<sup>11</sup> that has presented a distorted picture of his views and sadly made him often guilty through association with the radical 'death of God' theologies of the 'sixties. Phrases such as 'world come of age' and 'religionless Christianity' are certainly vulnerable to careless misuse by those eager to put an end to traditional theism, but any writer - and especially Bonhoeffer - must be judged according to the whole of his work and with due regard to his historical milieu. Thankfully, more complete analyses have emerged that reveal both the continuities and variations in his thought. On the one hand, there are those who have emphasized the changing pattern of his theology,<sup>12</sup> and on the other, those who stress its continuity.<sup>13</sup> As an example of the former, Moltmann speaks about

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11 Robinson, at least, acknowledges this fact. 'I have made no attempt to give a balanced picture of Bonhoeffer's theology as a whole . . . .' John A. T. Robinson, HONEST TO GOD (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1963), p.36.

12 Bethge, DIETRICH BONHOEFFER; Godsey, THE THEOLOGY OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER; Moltmann and Weissbach, TWO STUDIES IN THE THEOLOGY OF BONHOEFFER; Hanfried Müller, VON DER KIRCHE ZUR WELT. EIN BETRAG ZU DER BEZIEHUNG DES WORTES GOTTES AUF DIE SOCIETAS IN DIETRICH BONHOEFFERS THEOLOGISCHER ENTWICKLUNG, 1961, as cited in Dumas, DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, pp.248-54. John A. Phillips, THE FORM OF CHRIST IN THE WORLD - A STUDY OF BONHOEFFER'S CHRISTOLOGY (London: Collins, 1967); Hans Schmidt, 'The Cross of Reality? Some Questions Concerning the Interpretation of Bonhoeffer' in WORLD COME OF AGE - A SYMPOSIUM ON DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, ed. Ronald Gregor Smith (London: Collins, 1967), pp.215-55.

13 Anderson, HISTORICAL TRANSCENDENCE AND THE REALITY OF GOD, pp.72-100; Dumas DIETRICH BONHOEFFER; Hamilton, LIFE IN ONE'S STRIDE; William Kuhns, IN PURSUIT OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER (London: Burns & Oates, 1967); Heinrich Ott, REALITY AND FAITH - THE THEOLOGICAL LEGACY OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, trans. Alex. A. Morrison (London: Lutterworth Press, 1971); James W. Woelfel, BONHOEFFER'S THEOLOGY - CLASSICAL AND REVOLUTIONARY (Nashville & New York: Abingdon Press, 1970).



a 'far reaching shift in Bonhoeffer's thinking,'<sup>14</sup> whereas Ott has discovered an 'astonishing unity.'<sup>15</sup> It is true that those who discern a change also recognize certain unifying aspects and vice versa, but the fact remains that Bonhoeffer's many interpreters are arrayed on different sides of this fence. Why is this the case?

The answer, in my judgment, is that there is both a significant core of unified, continuous thought in Bonhoeffer's theology, and an undeniable change. Just as a caterpillar is metamorphosed into a butterfly yet maintains the same life, so the inner life of Bonhoeffer's thought remained unchanged, but as he reasoned in ever broader categories about its implications, aspects of it evolved into patterns that in the end were barely recognizable from those at the beginning. Full attention must be given to both the continuity and discontinuity of his theology if we are to use wisely the theological riches inherited from the life, death, and thinking of this contemporary martyr.

My argument, in brief, is that (A) the inner cohesion in Bonhoeffer's theology was his incarnational christology which understood Jesus Christ as the centre of restructured reality; (B) the place where reality is restructured in Christ shifted in his thinking from the Church to the world, partly because of external circumstances and partly because he followed out the inner logic of his Lutheran theology of incarnation; and (C) the result was a consequent loss of ontological distinction between the Church and the world, and an inadvertent de-historicizing of the gospel.

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14 Moltmann & Weissbach, TWO STUDIES IN THE THEOLOGY OF BONHOEFFER, pp.55-56.

15 Ott, REALITY AND FAITH, p.205.

### A. The Centre of Reality

'The one word which best sums up Bonhoeffer's entire theological development is christology. It is the golden thread which ties together his works from first to last.'<sup>16</sup> Like Barth, Bonhoeffer was rigorously christocentric, seeking to understand God and the world from the revelation of God himself in his Word, Jesus Christ. For this reason, a good place to begin with Bonhoeffer is his lectures given during the summer semester, 1933, at the University of Berlin.<sup>17</sup> Though the original manuscript has not survived, 'a large number of students' notes make possible a reasonably adequate reconstruction.'<sup>18</sup> Eberhard Bethge reckons this course of lectures was

the high point of Bonhoeffer's academic career.

This he felt to be the hardest task he had yet undertaken; not because interruptions became more frequent, but because he was faced with the task of bringing together, preserving and testing out all he had previously thought, said and attempted. 19

And if it was a summation of what went before, it was also an establishment of the base from which he would work in the future.<sup>20</sup>

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16 Woelfel, BONHOEFFER'S THEOLOGY, p.134. So also Phillips, THE FORM OF CHRIST IN THE WORLD, p.27: 'Bonhoeffer's emphasis on Christology, particularly on a Christology which exhibited certain definite and constant tendencies, is a basic clue to his thinking.'

17 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, CHRISTOLOGY, trans. Edwin Robertson (London: Collins, 1978).

18 Bethge, DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, p.164.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

The American title, CHRIST THE CENTER, is very appropriate, for it not only sums up the theme of these lectures, but it could be said that since it is here Bonhoeffer deals directly with christology, the work itself forms a kind of centre in his corpus.

Christology for Bonhoeffer is the science par excellence.<sup>21</sup> Since what is under investigation, however, is not an idea but a person, the usual scientific question 'How?' is ruled out. The only legitimate question is the personalistic 'Who?' This 'is the question of the dethroned and distraught reason, but it is also the question of faith: "Who are you? Are you God himself?"<sup>22</sup> This means

the christological question can only be posed scientifically in the setting of the Church. It can only be put where the basic presupposition, that Christ claims to be the Logos of God, is accepted: there where men ask about God because they know who he is . . . . Here a man can seek what has already been found. 23

Christology, then, is fundamentally an ontological question. 'Its aim is to work out the ontological structure of the "Who?"<sup>24</sup> Two questions are excluded from the outset: the question whether or not one may ask 'Who?', because the human logos cannot exalt itself above the Logos of God and because the testimony of Jesus is

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21 Bonhoeffer, CHRISTOLOGY, p.28.

22 Ibid., p.30.

23 Ibid., p.32. ' . . . even before Barth did so, Bonhoeffer studied theology only within, and on the basis of the Church.' Bethge, BONHOEFFER - EXILE AND MARTYR, p.63.

24 Ibid., p.33.

self-authenticating; and the question 'How?' for the same reason, i.e., the human logos cannot stake out an independent position by which to judge the revelation of God.<sup>25</sup> Siding with Luther, Bonhoeffer rejects attempts to begin with the work of Christ as a means to understanding his person. His work is ambiguously open to various interpretations.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the person of Christ is the central concern. 'The subject of christology is the personal structure of being of the complete historical Jesus Christ.'<sup>27</sup>

The word 'structure' should be carefully noted. It seems an alien word to the realm of theology - a stowaway from the foreign land of engineering or architecture, transported by a flight of theological fancy. But its very uniqueness in describing the person of Christ underscores its importance. In a sense, Bonhoeffer was anticipating his own call for a 'non-religious interpretation' of the gospel. He was restating the biblical witness in a fresh way, and it played a central role in his theology.<sup>28</sup> What does he mean when he speaks of 'the personal structure of being' of Jesus Christ?

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25 Ibid., p.32.

26 Ibid., pp.37-38.

27 Ibid., p.39.

28 'The two key-words in Bonhoeffer's thought, what might be called his formal principle and his substantive principle, are structuring (Gestaltung) and deputyship (Stellvertretung).' Dumas, DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, p.31.

'Structure' normally conveys an external meaning. When we speak of a building's structure, for example, we refer to a framework of a specific form. The edifice exists for a purpose, and its shape may be related to its end, but the 'structure' refers to its empirical shape quite apart from its particular use. A square brick building may be a home, school, shop, or garage - and the structure itself remains unchanged.

In Bonhoeffer's use of the word, however, it designates both empirical form and purpose. When he speaks of the structure of Jesus Christ he is referring to his external shape in the world and the inner meaning of his being. What is the structure of Christ?

The structure of his person must be outlined more and unfolded as the pro me structure (that is, the structure I can relate to) of the God-Man, Jesus Christ. Christ is Christ, not just for himself, but in relation to me. His being Christ is his being for me, pro me. This being pro me is not to be understood as an effect emanating from him, nor as an accident; but it is to be understood as the essence, the being of the person himself.

The core of the person himself is the pro me. 29

The pro me structure unified the being and act of Christ,<sup>30</sup> and it means three things for the new humanity. 1. Jesus is the first fruits, 'the first-born of many brethren who follow him.' 2. He stands in the place of the new humanity before God, as representative. 'He is the Church. He not only acts for it, he is it, when he goes to the cross, carries the sins and dies. Therefore, in him, mankind is crucified,

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29 Bonhoeffer, CHRISTOLOGY, p.47.

30 Ibid.

dead and judged.' 3. Because the new humanity is in him, God is gracious to it.<sup>31</sup> The structure of Jesus Christ, i.e., the inner meaning of his personal being, means that he is pro me, my redeemer.

But the Christ who is pro me is the Incarnate, Crucified, and Risen One. Because he is the Logos who became man, assuming the likeness of sinful flesh, he cannot be thought of in a spiritualized, docetic way. As the Incarnate One who bound together the reality of God and the reality of humanity, his structure must have an external, empirical form. The question about the place of Christ is thus legitimate. 'Where?' is contained within the question 'Who?'<sup>32</sup> This spatial vocabulary is important.<sup>33</sup> As the Incarnate One, God has made a space for himself, concretely, in the world. 'Jesus Christ is the one who structures the world by representing its true reality before God until the end'<sup>34</sup>; and, like any structure, it is inconceivable that it could have anything but a concrete, empirical place in the world.

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31 Ibid., p.48.

32 Ibid., p.59.

33 'By adopting a forthrightly spatial vocabulary, drawn from both sociology and logic, Bonhoeffer is trying to overcome this suspicion that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ might be only tangentially related to the ongoingness of the world, without being understood for what it truly is, the central structure of all reality.' Dumas, DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, pp.218-19.

34 Ibid., p.32.



Before considering Bonhoeffer's answer to the question 'Where?', we should pause to clarify the use of a word that has cropped up several times already in this chapter: reality. Though Bonhoeffer does not use the word directly in these early lectures, it is one that takes a very important place in his later writings, and because what he meant by it was already implicit in the earliest stages of his thought, we would do well to speak of it at this point. Many interpreters of Bonhoeffer have identified reality as a fundamental motif of his theology.<sup>35</sup> Ott writes:

The fundamental tendency of Bonhoeffer's thought from the earliest days . . . . to the latest, as can easily be shown from the ETHICS and from LETTERS AND PAPERS FROM PRISON, is precisely that he wrestles with reality and seeks to match the articulation of his thought to its divine - human concreteness. 36

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- 35 Anderson, HISTORICAL TRANSCENDENCE AND THE REALITY OF GOD, p.74 ('Stated in the broadest possible terms, Bonhoeffer's problem was that of uniting the reality of God with the reality of the world'); Dumas, DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, p.36 ('Bonhoeffer's theology is a theology of reality'); Gerhard Ebeling, WORD AND FAITH, trans. James W. Leitch (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1963), p.284 ('The concept of reality runs through the whole of Bonhoeffer's work . . .'); Moltmann & Weissbach, TWO STUDIES IN THE THEOLOGY OF BONHOEFFER, pp.60-61 ('The difficult problems of act and being which had engaged Bonhoeffer in his earlier writings are dropped. In their place we now have the exciting new concept of "reality" as the focal point'); Ott, REALITY AND FAITH, p.316 ('. . . his problem in all parts of his thought is reality. This was the subject both of his life, and of his theology'); Schmidt, 'The Cross of Reality?', p.216 ('Bonhoeffer was unable to solve the problem of the relationships between the reality of the world and the reality of God which tormented him').
- 36 Ott, REALITY AND FAITH, p.198. This large study is, as the title indicates, aimed at underscoring the importance of this concept for Bonhoeffer. Unfortunately, it suffers from an a-historical approach that ignores the formative events surrounding his life.

Because God and humanity are concretely united in Christ, we may no longer think in a dualistic manner. Jesus Christ is the revelation of the one reality of God and world. More about that later, but at this point observe: his concern for reality is a consequence of the incarnation.

It is because he took so seriously the incarnation of the Son of God in the space and time of this world that he insisted 'that there is no real possibility of being a Christian outside the reality of this world and that there is no worldly existence outside the reality of Jesus Christ.' There is no place therefore to which the Christian can withdraw from the world; rather he must learn to live out the reality of Christ within it, for it is in that world that He the Son of God made our reality His own, and made His reality ours. 37

In Christ, then, windmills are not giants, the real is not lost to imagination, but becomes concrete. The incarnation is the methodological starting point. God and humankind are united in the concrete reality of Jesus Christ; from this perspective alone can we understand God and his creation.<sup>38</sup>

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37 Thomas F. Torrance, GOD AND RATIONALITY (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p.78.

38 For an interesting Roman Catholic appraisal of Bonhoeffer's incarnational approach, see William Kuhns, IN PURSUIT OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER. 'Bonhoeffer's radical understanding of the Incarnation may be the key to his thought and to the development taken in his thought. It is, I am convinced, the secret of his availability to Catholics, and the most promising avenue for pursuing his relevance for Catholic theology. Catholics are more sensitive to the Incarnation as a fundamental mystery than are Protestants, if by the simple fact that they must live with some institutional consequences of the Incarnation in a way that Protestants do not' (p.262).

Now again we raise the question 'Where?' Where does the structural reality of Jesus Christ take shape? Where does one empirically find its form? If it is the reality of the Incarnate One, it must have a distinct place in this world. Bonhoeffer's answer to this question varied, depending on when he responded to it. This is the changing aspect of his theology that has so divided his interpreters. Here we come to the heart of the problem. In pursuing an incarnational christology, Bonhoeffer was consistent throughout his life, but when he sought to identify the place of the reality of Jesus Christ, his thought shifted. Early in his career he identified it as the Church; at the end, the world.<sup>39</sup> Just as a pebble thrown into a pond sends out wider and wider concentric circles, so Bonhoeffer's christology had an expanding horizon. The centre always remained Jesus Christ, but the place of his structured reality began in the Church and gradually widened to encompass the world.

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39 While I am much indebted to John Phillips' excellent study, THE FORM OF CHRIST IN THE WORLD, for highlighting aspects of the changing pattern of Bonhoeffer's thought, and especially for showing its relationship to the tumultuous historical circumstances of his day, it should be clear I cannot accept his so-called 'two Christologies' (p.75). Bonhoeffer, it seems to me, has one christology with an ever-widening horizon of application.

The dissertation he wrote for his doctoral degree from the University of Berlin, The Communion of Saints, would be noteworthy in itself, but that Bonhoeffer wrote it at the age of twenty-one years makes it a remarkable piece of work. Barth praised it (though unfortunately too late for Bonhoeffer to have appreciated it) in the CHURCH DOGMATICS by confessing his own misgivings whether he could reach the high level it attains.<sup>40</sup> What Bonhoeffer sought to accomplish in this very academic book was - in his own words - 'to understand the structure, from the standpoint of social philosophy and sociology, of the reality of the church of Christ which is given in the revelation of Christ.'<sup>41</sup> Bonhoeffer's attempt, in other words, was to understand the social structure of the Church in a way that made full use of social philosophy and sociology to help elucidate dogmatic ecclesiology. Given his incarnational premises, the use of empirical methods of investigation was fully legitimate, since the Church as the place of the Incarnate One was for him no docetic idea but concrete in space and time. He recognized that the Church is more than a human fellowship, and thus social science alone could not reveal its total essence; nevertheless, the nature of God's reality in Christ has social dimensions. Although the unique structure of the Church can be known only on the basis of revelation,<sup>42</sup> what is given to us is an empirically discernable sociality.

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40 Barth, CHURCH DOGMATICS, ed. T. F. Torrance & G. W. Bromiley, trans. G. W. Bromiley, et. al. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936-69), IV/2, p.641 (hereafter cited as CD).

41 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS - A DOGMATIC INQUIRY INTO THE SOCIOLOGY OF THE CHURCH, trans. and ed. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

42 Ibid., p.89.

For Bonhoeffer, the person presupposes relationships.

Man is not conceived by God, the all-embracing Person as an abstract, individual being, but as in natural communication with other men, and in his relation with them not satisfying just one side of his otherwise closed spiritual existence, but rather discovering in this relation his reality, that is, his life as an I. God created man and woman, each dependent on the other. God does not desire a history of individual men, but the history of the community of men. Nor does he desire a community which absorbs the individual into itself, but a community of men. In his sight the community and the individual are present at the same moment, and the rest in one another. 43

Created as persons, men and women were placed in an original fellowship with God and others, but the consequence of the Fall is broken fellowship, ruptured relationship. Thus, the true reality of God is re-created in Jesus Christ through the restructured fellowship effected by his Spirit.<sup>44</sup> 'The thread between God and man which the first Adam severed is joined anew by God, by his revealing his love in Christ.'<sup>45</sup> Thus, 'the church is God's new purpose for men.'<sup>46</sup> In Jesus Christ

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43 Bonhoeffer, THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS, p.52. See also p.201. Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, CREATION AND FALL, trans. John C. Fletcher (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1959), pp.61-62, where Bonhoeffer understands the community of man and woman as the original form of the Church. Cf. also Dietrich Bonhoeffer NO RUSTY SWORDS - LETTERS, LECTURES AND NOTES, 1928-1936, ed. Edwin H. Robertson, trans. John Bowden, Eberhard Bethge (London: Collins, 1965), p.34. In a letter to Rössler from Barcelona dated 7th August 1928, Bonhoeffer writes: 'Men are not the same even at the deepest level, but they are individuals, totally different and only united by the Word in the church.'

44 Ibid., p.89. 112.

45 Ibid., p.106.

46 Ibid., p.103.

persons are set in reality, i.e., they are united once again in relationship with God and each other, thereby attaining their true state as persons.<sup>47</sup> All of this is quite empirically observable,<sup>48</sup> because God's reality is as concrete as the Incarnate Christ himself.

Now if the reality of Jesus Christ is set forth in the communion of relationships established in him, then it follows that the Church is the place of Christ in the world. Or, better put, where he is, the Church is.

If we look at the church not in terms of how it is built up, but as a unified reality, then the image of the body of Christ must dominate. What does this really mean? . . . . If we take the thought of the body seriously, then it means that this 'image' identifies Christ with the church, as Paul himself clearly does (I Cor.12.12 6.5); for where my body is, there too am I. 49

Bonhoeffer interprets Paul as teaching, 'Christ himself is the church.'<sup>50</sup> Though the Church as we know it is beset by imperfections, has a relativity of forms, and is unpretentious in appearance, nevertheless, 'the empirical church is the Body of Christ, the presence of Christ on earth . . .',<sup>51</sup> The Incarnate One has fully entered history,

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47 'The Church is the concrete place where human existence receives its form and structure in Christ, where the everyday world discovers its true reality . . . . This is why to be a Christian is to become true man once more.' Dumas, DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, pp.33-34.

48 Bonhoeffer, THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS, pp.114-38. 'The Word is active in three different ways; the Holy Spirit, that is, acts in a three-fold way upon his church, analagous to the three basic sociological relationships which we found were in force in the church established in Christ: as a multiplicity of spirits, as community of spirit and as spiritual unity. These three forms are thus analogous also to the basic sociological data which we saw formed the essential structure of every community' (pp.116-17).

49 Ibid., pp.99-100.

50 Ibid., p.138.

51 Ibid., p.145.

so that now 'the church is his presence in history . . . . For the church is Christ existing as the church.'<sup>52</sup> Five years later Bonhoeffer expressed the same idea when he identified the Church as 'the presence of God in the world. Really in the world, really the presence of God.'<sup>53</sup> Therefore, since God is present to us only in Christ, 'the church is the presence of Christ on earth, the church is Christus praesens.'<sup>54</sup> The logical conclusion: extra ecclesiam nulla salus.<sup>55</sup> 'Communion with God exists through Christ, but Christ is present only in his church, hence there is communion with God only in the church.'<sup>56</sup> Bonhoeffer can without hesitation refer to the empirical Church as 'the organized "institution" of salvation . . . '<sup>57</sup> The Church, then, is our Mother, for through her we have life, and our response to her can only be gratitude.<sup>58</sup> Gratefully we gather around the Word entrusted to her in preaching and the sacraments,<sup>59</sup> and by these concrete functions the Spirit unites us in community.

Where is the place of Jesus Christ? It is clear that when Bonhoeffer wrote THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS, he identified it as the Church. 'Overflowing from the heart of God, the church is reality

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52 Ibid., p.146. See also p.135.

53 Bonhoeffer, NO RUSTY SWORDS, p.150.

54 Ibid., p.157.

55 Bonhoeffer, THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS, p.193.

56 Ibid., p.116.

57 Ibid., p.144.

58 Ibid., 157.

59 Ibid., pp.155-56.



as restructured in Jesus Christ.'<sup>60</sup> The Church is the world as God meant it to be, the space where it is structured according to its centre. 'The church is the ongoing outworking of the incarnation.'<sup>61</sup>

His view remained unchanged by the time he wrote ACT AND BEING. This habilitation thesis, submitted to the Berlin faculty in 1930, sets out to unite 'hostile brothers, whether they be called transcendentalists and ontologists, or theologians of action and theologians of being, or Barthians and Lutherans'<sup>62</sup> by applying his understanding of 'Christ existing as community' to the problems of philosophy. This is how Bonhoeffer described the question at issue: 'The problem is one of forming genuine theological concepts and choosing whether one is to use ontological categories in explaining them or those of transcendental philosophy.'<sup>63</sup> The latter stress act, the former being, and the whole of theology depends on which of these it emphasizes.<sup>64</sup>

Ray Anderson has provided a very succinct summary of what Bonhoeffer was doing in this book:

While he now leaves behind his concern with the sociological categories which comprise the reality of the Church as an empirical community, he continues his theme of the Church as the community of revelation which mediates between the sheer contingency of a theology of act and the static and objectifying of a theology of being. The philosophical foils for his argument were the transcendentalism of Kant and the ontology of Heidegger, but in a positive sense, he is seeking

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60 Dumas, DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, p.91.

61 Ibid., p.82.

62 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ACT AND BEING, trans. Bernard Noble (London: Collins, 1962), p.12.

63 Ibid., p.14.

64 Bethge, DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, p.96.



to unite the concept of revelation which he found in Karl Barth with the reality of man in community, thus giving continuity and concreteness to revelation without making it an entity which man possesses by his ideas or his institutions. Revelation is the community established by the Word and Spirit of God - Christ existing as the Church. 65

Transcendentalism, as Bonhoeffer understands it, derives from the Kantian differentiation between a thing-in-itself and the apperception of it. Reason is accordingly delimited, and understanding is severely restricted. Existence is understood as being in reference to knowledge; hence, as act.

To understand existence is, for Kant, to know oneself in being as 'having reference,' to feel the radical challenge which knowledge throws down to the knowing self, to be unable to rest in oneself without surrendering oneself, to be purely and simply the act. 66

But transcendentalism has at its heart an inner contradiction, because it is reason itself that has understood and defined its limitations. 'Reason has become the critic of reason' and thus reinstates itself to its original rights. The result, therefore, is that man understands himself 'not from the transcendental but from himself.' 67 Entangled in himself, man has 'no possibility of asserting the being of God outside the I, since there is only the reason alone with itself.' 68

If Kant dethroned any meaningful ontology, it was Hegel who restored it. 69 The task of a true ontology is to demonstrate the

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65 Anderson, HISTORICAL TRANSCENDENCE AND THE REALITY OF GOD, p.75.

66 Bonhoeffer, ACT AND BEING, p.23.

67 Ibid., p.21.

68 Ibid., p.32.

69 Ibid., p.49.

primacy of being over consciousness, to say that there is real being outside limits of reason.<sup>70</sup> Drawing on Heidegger, Bonhoeffer explains the ontological position as recognizing that 'all thought is but an ontological characteristic of Dasein.'<sup>71</sup> It does not produce itself. It just is. The difficulty with this, however, is that in considering being the a priori of thought in such a way that thought itself is suspended in being, being itself somehow comes into the power of the thinking I.<sup>72</sup>

The result is that both positions are unacceptable because both evolve into an I-enclosed universe. Hence neither can help in understanding the concept of revelation. Consequently

in both cases the I understands itself from within a closed system. Per se, a philosophy cannot spare room for revelation; let it then recognize revelation and confess itself Christian philosophy, knowing that the place it wished to usurp is already occupied by another - Christ. 73

Human existence, then, must be understood in reference to revelation.<sup>74</sup> Revelation is both transcendent and ontological. It is contingent - absolutely free in relation to reason, an occurrence which is an unfettered act of God.<sup>75</sup> Barth correctly understood this aspect of

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70 Ibid.

71 Ibid., p.62.

72 Ibid., p.70.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid., p.80.

75 Ibid.

revelation; however, God is not free of but for humanity. The Word of God's freedom is Christ. Therefore, revelation must also be understood in ontological categories. Revelation exists, is present, accessible in being.<sup>76</sup>

The revelation of God is his Word, Jesus Christ, and since Christ is the Church, the Church is the unity of act and being.<sup>77</sup>

'The Christian communion is God's final revelation: God as "Christ existing as community."' <sup>78</sup> God's free revelation, his act, is the being of the community of persons constituted and embraced in Christ.<sup>79</sup>

ACT AND BEING is clearly one with THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS in its understanding of the Church as the concrete place of Christ in the world. At this stage in Bonhoeffer's thought there is a clear, ontological distinction between the Church and the world.

John Phillips sets forth what he judges to be the weakness in this phase of his thought:

The dangers of his position are reasonably clear: His view of revelation as the church leaves open the question of the relationship of Christ and the church to the world outside of the church. 80

The consequence, he avers, is that Bonhoeffer began to think in broader christological terms. History intervened, however, and with the Confessing Church struggle his christo-ecclesiology became even more radical and exclusive. For evidence of a changing direction,

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76 Ibid., p.108.

77 Ibid., pp.117-51.

78 Ibid., p.121.

79 Ibid., pp.123, 148.

80 Phillips, THE FORM OF CHRIST IN THE WORLD, p.69.

Cf. Anderson, HISTORICAL TRANSCENDENCE AND THE REALITY OF GOD, p.82, and Schmidt, 'The Cross of Reality,' pp.228-29.

Phillips cites CHRISTOLOGY, placing great emphasis on these 1933 lectures: 'The former theme, "Christ existing as the church," the "community of revelation," was made subservient to a concept of Christ as the "transcendent person."' <sup>81</sup> The emphasis now is on the person of Christ in relation to the individual believer.

It is true that Bonhoeffer answered the question 'Where?' in these lectures by identifying the place of Christ in personalistic terms. Where is he? He stands pro me, in my place, at the centre of my existence and at its boundary between the old I and the new I. <sup>82</sup> The spatial location of Christ at the centre is very important and consistently plays a role in Bonhoeffer's thought. In CREATION AND FALL, he comments on the fact that the tree of life was in the middle of the garden: 'This means that God, who gives life, is in the middle . . . . Adam's life comes from the middle which is not Adam himself but God,' <sup>83</sup> With the Fall, however, the middle-place has been violated by selfish seizure. 'Now man stands in the middle, now he is without limit . . . . now he lives out of his own resources and no longer from the middle.' <sup>84</sup> Adam's situation is desperate for he is imprisoned within himself. <sup>85</sup> Salvation demands a new spatial restructuring of human life. The reality of God must once more become

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81 Ibid., p.70.

82 Bonhoeffer, CHRISTOLOGY, p.60.

83 Bonhoeffer, CREATION AND FALL, pp.49-50.

84 Ibid., p.73.

85 Ibid., p.93.

the centre,<sup>86</sup> and that is just what happens in Christ. He is the centre - of my existence and the world.

Is this, then, a different emphasis as Phillips contends? Listen to what Bonhoeffer says about Christ in relation to the person: 'Christ can never be thought of as being for himself, but only in relation to me. That in turn means that Christ can only be thought of existentially, or to put in another way, in the Church.'<sup>87</sup> In other words, one knows Christ only in faith, and to have faith means that one is already in Christ, that is, in his Body the Church. Thus Bonhoeffer does not consider it in the least bit contradictory to say Christ is at the centre of my personal being, and yet to continue to affirm that Christ is present in and as the Church. Bonhoeffer's incarnational stress should not be forgotten here. To speak of Christ simply as the centre of my personal existence may lead to a docetism in which the presence of Christ is understood spiritually, but not concretely in the reality of this world. His presence does, however, assume a particular form. 'Between his ascension and his coming again the Church is his form and indeed his only form.'<sup>88</sup> His form as Church is, concretely, his presence as Word (the incarnational incognito and humiliation of the God-Man continues to be worked out in hidden form, in the stumbling block of the offensiveness of preaching),

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86 It is interesting to note that this theme recurs again at the end of his life. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, LETTERS AND PAPERS FROM PRISON, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Reginald Fuller, et. al. (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1971) (hereafter cited as LPP), p.282: 'I should like to speak of God not on the boundaries but at the centre . . . .'

87 Bonhoeffer, CHRISTOLOGY, p.47.

88 Ibid., p.58.

sacrament, and the gathered community.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, if Christ is present in the Church, it is the centre of history.

As is evident from his earliest writings, Bonhoeffer's constant concern was to understand the concreteness of the gospel. At every juncture he sought to grasp the implications of the incarnation. The Church, for him, was the concrete form of the reality of God restructured in Jesus Christ. And perhaps it was this striving for concreteness that led Bonhoeffer, in the early 1930's, into an intense interest in the commandment of God.<sup>90</sup> This is reflected in various lectures and papers written at the time, and especially in his recurring reflection on the Sermon on the Mount. The latter finally found full expression in THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP, perhaps Bonhoeffer's most well-known work. Written in 1935 while he was the director of the Preachers' Seminary of the Confessing Church at Finkenwalde, it aims to understand the life of faith in terms of concrete discipleship.

At the outset, Bonhoeffer distinguishes between cheap and costly grace. Though the former seems to be the common standard of the day, it is a perversion of the great Reformation rediscovery of justification by faith. It is grace as doctrine, a principle, a system - lifeless.<sup>91</sup> Having lost its tension with the world, 'the Christian life comes to mean nothing more than living in the world and as the world, in being

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89 Ibid., pp.46, 48.

90 Bonhoeffer, NO RUSTY SWORDS, pp.153-69, 284-87.

91 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP, trans. R. H. Fuller & Irmgard Booth (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1959), p.35.

no different from the world, in fact, in being prohibited from being different from the world for the sake of grace.'<sup>92</sup> Its concern is the justification of sin, but not the sinner.

Costly grace, however, is not sold on the market like cheapjack wares. It is costly because it is a summons to follow, and it is grace because it is an invitation to follow Jesus Christ.<sup>93</sup> The call to discipleship is an invitation to an exclusive attachment to his person. The key point is this: 'Only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes.'<sup>94</sup>

If the first half of the proposition stands alone, the believer is exposed to the dangers of cheap grace, which is another word for damnation. If the second half stands alone, the believer is exposed to the danger of salvation through works, which is also another word for damnation. 95

The call of Christ is a command to deny oneself, which means to look solely at Christ, to be aware only of him and no more of self. It is a death. 'When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.'<sup>96</sup>

Through his exposition of the Sermon on the Mount and the corpus Paulinum which follows, Bonhoeffer makes very clear that discipleship involves a separation from the world.<sup>97</sup> It is the 'hall-mark of Christianity.' Discipleship is a step away from the world in

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92 Ibid., p.42.

93 Ibid., p.37.

94 Ibid., p.54.

95 Ibid., p.58.

96 Ibid., p.79.

97 Ibid., pp.98, 106, 139, 199-275.

answer to Christ's call. But how do we hear his summons today? Well, we must listen in the place where he is found, 'that is, in the Church through the ministry of the Word and Sacrament. The preaching of the Church and the administration of the sacraments is the place where Jesus Christ is present.'<sup>98</sup> Jesus calls us to obedience through his personal presence on earth, the Church, and our response (signified in baptism) betokens a breach with the world. True, the Christian remains in the world, possessing a secular calling, but he is there only to engage in frontal assault on it, to show himself a stranger and sojourner in this world. 'The antithesis between the world and the Church must be borne out in the world. That was the purpose of the incarnation.'<sup>99</sup> The language Bonhoeffer uses here is uncompromising. The Christian is 'torn from the clutches of the world,'<sup>100</sup> he lives on the other side of 'the great gulf,'<sup>101</sup> and is 'waging war.'<sup>102</sup> Bonhoeffer describes the sealing of the Spirit pictorially:

The community of the saints is barred off from the world by an unbreakable seal, awaiting its ultimate deliverance. Like a sealed train travelling through foreign territory, the Church goes on its way through the world. Its journey is like that of an ark, which was 'pitched within and without with pitch' (Gen. 6.14), so that it might come safely through the flood. 103

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98 Ibid., p.201.

99 Ibid., p.239.

100 Ibid., p.245.

101 Ibid., p.241.

102 Ibid., p.253.

103 Ibid., p.251.



The Church must be thus separated from the world, for it is God's habitation on earth, the place from which judgment and reconciliation go forth, the place of Jesus Christ.<sup>104</sup> As a consequence of the incarnation, this place must have space in the world.<sup>105</sup> Though the world will seek to crowd it out, it must stand firm in all its spatial concreteness.

This theme has a recurrent echo in Bonhoeffer's ecumenical and ecclesiastical work of that period. In 1936 he wrote two essays that once again underscored the concreteness and distinctiveness of the Church. In 'The Visible Church In The New Testament',<sup>106</sup> he laid aside any ecclesiological docetism of a Church which claims no place, and the secular, materialistic approach which is often associated with a magical attitude to the sacraments (Barth gives rise to the first danger, as he sees it, and Dibelius the second).<sup>107</sup> The Pentecost story of Acts 2 indicates the founding of the Church was a visible event. The Spirit made a place for himself in the world with visible signs.<sup>108</sup> The activity of the Spirit is creative, and his coming is the new creation. No new religion has been founded by his presence; 'a part of the world has been made anew.'<sup>109</sup> This second creation is the reality of God.<sup>110</sup>

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104 Ibid.

105 Ibid., p.240.

106 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, THE WAY TO FREEDOM - LETTERS, LECTURES AND NOTES 1935-1939, ed. Edwin H. Robertson, trans. Edwin H. Robertson & John Bowden (London: Collins, 1966), pp.42-51.

107 Ibid., pp.42-43.

108 Ibid., p.45.

109 Ibid., p.47.

110 Ibid., p.48.

In the same year, Bonhoeffer wrote a very controversial essay on 'The Question of the Boundaries of the Church and Church Union.'<sup>111</sup> It is, he said, a question that does not arise from within the Church. The Reformation set us free from the theoretical speculation about the saved and the lost. Instead is heard only the joyful cry, 'Here is the Gospel! Here is the Church! Come here!'<sup>112</sup> The problem arises, though, from outside. Some refuse the invitation, and then the question of boundaries arises. Baptism as a guide in this matter is too full of difficulties,<sup>113</sup> so we are led to the Confessions. They are crucial because they are the Church's 'decision about its boundaries made on the basis of theology . . . a decision . . . to join battle at a specific place.'<sup>114</sup>

For the Confessing Church struggle, the Synods of Barmen and Dahlem (1934) are definitive in the question of boundaries. There the Church took a stand. Barmen declared the teaching of the German Christians false, and such teaching has no place in the Church. Dahlem declared that the National Church had separated itself from the Christian Church.<sup>115</sup> What does this historical fact mean?

Extra ecclesiam nulla salus. The question of church membership is the question of salvation. The boundaries of the church are the boundaries of salvation. Whoever knowingly cuts himself off from the Confessing Church in Germany cuts himself off from salvation. 116

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111 Ibid., pp.75-96.

112 Ibid., p.75.

113 Ibid., p.80.

114 Ibid., p.83.

115 Ibid., p.86.

116 Ibid., pp.93-94.

As might be expected, this bold deduction caused a furor of protest, and its author was accused of everything from 'enthusiasm' to 'Romanism.' Bonhoeffer was shocked at this sharp response - and no wonder. It was for him a matter of simple logic, as it had always been. He was affirming nothing new. Salvation is in Christ; to be in Christ is to be in the Church; and if Barmen and Dahlem had declared the Confessing Church the true Church of Germany, then what else could be concluded? It was not a matter of speculation about who was saved and lost (this is where Rome had perhaps failed), but simply an offer of grace, a matter of faith.<sup>117</sup>

It must be said again and again that for the church to deny its boundaries is no work of mercy. The true church comes up against boundaries. In recognizing them it does the work of love towards men by honouring the church. 118

Before advancing to the next phase of Bonhoeffer's thought, it should be pointed out that for all his vigorously strong accents on the distinctiveness of the Church as the concrete place of Jesus Christ in the world, Bonhoeffer was no romantic out of touch with the actual shortcomings of the Church in his day. Hans Schmidt has suggested that his shift in emphasis away from the Church to the world (which we will consider shortly) was due to the conflict between his maximum praise for the visible Church and his minimum of concrete, practical experience with it.<sup>119</sup> The implication is that everyday encounter with

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117 Ibid., p.94.

118 Ibid., p.95.

119 Schmidt, 'The Cross of Reality?', p.229.

the Church tended to undermine his high theological view of it. It is probable that when the Confessing Church flagged in zeal and made certain compromises accommodating itself to the harsh difficulties of a war-torn country, Bonhoeffer felt deep disappointment, but that that in itself shook his theology loose from an ecclesiology to a christology of wider dimensions is not likely. All along Bonhoeffer was wary of any idealization of the empirical Church. It was, for him, the concrete reality of God, but it was God's reality, his creation. As early as THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS he warned that the 'confusion of community romanticism with the communion of saints is extremely dangerous. The communion of saints must always be recognized as something established by God . . .',<sup>120</sup> And after his unusual experiences with the House of Brethren community at Finkenwalde, which was closed down in 1937 by the Gestapo, Bonhoeffer recorded, in a general format, what had been done there in LIFE TOGETHER, the most widely read of his books during his lifetime.<sup>121</sup> In it he presses home the fact that divine community is not a human ideal, but a reality created by God, and thus every wish dream projected on to the Christian community is a hindrance to genuine fellowship. Instead, thankfulness for what God has given must be the tenor of life together.

If we do not give thanks daily for the Christian fellowship in which we have been placed, even where there is no great experience, no discoverable riches, but much weakness, small faith and difficulty; if on the contrary, we only keep complaining to God that everything is so paltry and petty, so far from what we expected, then we hinder God from letting our fellowship grow

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120 Bonhoeffer, THE COMMUNITY OF SAINTS, p.196.

121 Bethge, DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, p.387.

according to the measure and riches which are there for us all in Jesus Christ. 122

Though it is not likely that disillusionment with day-to-day Church involvement caused him to look elsewhere for the manifestation of God's reality, it is certain, in my judgment, that his thought was to take a significant turn. Though some have glossed over the change in his thinking,<sup>123</sup> Moltmann has grasped something important when he describes a 'far-reaching shift' that took place between THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP and his wartime writings (ETHICS and LETTERS AND PAPERS FROM PRISON).<sup>124</sup> And Hanfried Müller, though overstating his case, has discerned a movement FROM THE CHURCH TO THE WORLD, as the title of his book suggests.<sup>125</sup> As Bonhoeffer continued to strive to comprehend the reality of God restructured in Christ, there was a broadening of his vision. His horizon expanded, so that what was an early preoccupation with the Church and its distinctiveness, gave way to a new concern for the world as a whole. In the first stage of his thought, the emphasis was on a movement from the world to the Church. Now he is concerned with precisely the opposite movement.<sup>126</sup> This change was accompanied, and no doubt influenced, by his decision to become involved in underground activity.

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122 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, LIFE TOGETHER, trans. John W. Doberstein (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1954), p.17.

123 As e.g. Dumas, DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, pp.91ff.

124 Moltmann & Weissbach, TWO STUDIES IN THE THEOLOGY OF BONHOEFFER, pp.55-56.

125 Müller, VON DER KIRCHE ZUR WELT. For a more condensed presentation of his view, see his 'The Problem of the Reception and Interpretation of Dietrich Bonhoeffer' in WORLD COME OF AGE, ed. R. G. Smith, pp.182-214.

126 Godsey, THE THEOLOGY OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, p.269.

At the beginning of 1939 Bonhoeffer the theologian and Christian was entering fully into his contemporary world, his place and his time. That means into a world which his bourgeois class had helped to bring about, rather than prevent. He accepted the weight of that collective responsibility, and began to identify himself with those who were prepared to answer for guilt and try tentatively to shape something new for the future, instead of merely resting on ideological grounds, as had hitherto been usual on the ecclesiastical plane. So in 1939 the theologian and Christian became a contemporary. 127

It was not that Bonhoeffer was blind to the world before.

The world is present at the beginning of his thought, just as the Church is at the end. As early as 1928, Bonhoeffer confessed in a letter from Barcelona:

One thing strikes me again and again: here one meets people as they are, away from the masquerade of the 'Christian world,' people with passions, criminal types, little people with little ambitions, little desires and little sins, all in all people who feel homeless in both senses of the word, who loosen up if one talks to them in a friendly way, real people; I can only say that I have gained the impression that it is just these people who are much more under grace than under wrath, and that it is the Christian world which is more under wrath than grace. 128

Here one senses a conception in Bonhoeffer's mind that will one day give birth to ideas, such as the non-religious interpretation of the gospel, that emerge in the LETTERS AND PAPERS FROM PRISON. Also, some of his major ethical themes are nascent in his lectures to his congregation in Spain on the priority of grace in Christian ethics

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127 Bethge, DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, p.581. See also Godsey, THE THEOLOGY OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, pp.263-64.

128 Bonhoeffer, NO RUSTY SWORDS, p.34.

and the consequent freedom before God one has in the concrete moment of decision.<sup>129</sup> He even anticipates the worldliness of the Christian in words that are remarkably similar to those written sixteen years later:

A glimpse of eternity is revealed only through the depths of our earth, only through the storms of human conscience . . . . The man who would leave the earth, who would depart from the present distress, loses the power which still holds him to the eternal, mysterious forces. The earth remains our mother, just as God remains our Father, and our mother will only lay in the Father's arms him who remains true to her. That is the Christian's song of the earth and her distress. 130

These words are surprising, coming as they do at a time when the young theologian was so carefully arguing that the Church is our mother. They do indicate, therefore, that we cannot speak of an about-face in the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.<sup>131</sup> There is an evolutionary change of emphasis.

It has already been indicated that various circumstances in Bonhoeffer's life, such as his decision to join the resistance, may have contributed to the broadening of his christological vision. It is my conviction, however, that there was a more fundamental reason, namely, his incarnational christology - the inner logic of which naturally pushed his thought outward as he considered its implications in ever-broader categories of thought.

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129 Ibid., pp.35-44.

130 Ibid., p.43.

131 For further evidence, see CREATION AND FALL, pp.35-36, 38, 44, 67. Here Bonhoeffer affirms our bond to the earth and our being-there-for-others - themes which later emerge in the prison letters.



The doctrinal soil out of which this christology blossomed was Lutheranism and its insistence on the finitum capax infiniti, the finite can encompass the infinite. Against the Reformed view, finitum incapax infiniti, Bonhoeffer joined ranks with Luther in vigorous protest all his life.<sup>132</sup> Whereas Reformed theologians held that the glory of the sovereign God is always transcendent over creaturely reality, and hence never fully contained within it, Luther affirmed the capacity of the finite for the infinite, according to his understanding of the incarnation, where, he believed, the human nature of Jesus did contain the infinite. As Bethge understands it, this was a concern for Bonhoeffer in ACT AND BEING where

he argues with Barth, warning him of the dangers of his transcendental philosophy and trying to make him more 'Lutheran.' He wanted to persuade him of his own belief in the finitum capax infiniti, that in spite of everything God was accessible. 133

This was a constant point at issue for Bonhoeffer throughout his theological development, and, as James Woelfel has suggested, could well be his theological motto.<sup>134</sup> It reflects his life-long concern for concreteness. If one truly encounters reality in the God-Man, Jesus Christ, then God himself must be fully in that reality and not hidden behind it, discoverable only through a process of abstraction. The only majestic, sovereign, free God we know is the

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132 Bethge, 'Bonhoeffer's Life And Theology,' WORLD COME OF AGE, ed. Ronald Gregor Smith, pp.36-37.

133 Bethge, DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, p.97.

134 Woelfel, BONHOEFFER'S THEOLOGY, p.141. See also Marty, 'Introduction: Problems and Possibilities in Bonhoeffer's Thought,' THE PLACE OF BONHOEFFER, ed. Martin Marty, p.21, and Phillips, THE FORM OF CHRIST IN THE WORLD, pp.170-72.



one revealed in Jesus Christ. He is not free of humanity; he is free for humanity. He is 'haveable,' 'graspable,' in Jesus Christ.<sup>135</sup> The Incarnate One is the concrete glory of God.

T. F. Torrance has shown that the traditional Lutheran understanding is based on a receptacle notion of space and time - a view not held by Patristic theology and one made obsolete by modern theories of relativity.<sup>136</sup> The finitum capax infiniti had the effect of consolidating the receptacle view in the epistemological structure of Lutheran thought.<sup>137</sup> The finite was understood as a type of container which, in Christ, held the infinite. But when they focused attention upon the nature of the creaturely receptacle

the receptacle had to be enlarged in order to make it receive the divine nature within its dimensions, and so it was held that the Son of God communicated to the humanity of Christ an infinite capacity enabling it to be filled with the divine fullness. 138

Hence the Lutheran development of the communicatio idiomatum, the communication of attributes.<sup>139</sup>

Reformed theologians have accepted this doctrine to the extent that it affirms that idiomata of either nature belong to the whole

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135 Ibid., p.142.

136 Thomas F. Torrance, SPACE, TIME AND INCARNATION (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p.30.

137 Ibid., p.35.

138 Ibid., p.140.

139 For a brief summary of the Lutheran understanding of communicatio idiomatum, see J. A. Dorner, HISTORY OF PROTESTANT THEOLOGY, vol.II, trans. George Robson & Sophia Taylor (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1871), p.148.

person of Christ (genus naturarum), and that acts of his one person are at the same time acts of the two natures cooperating in the work of redemption (genus apotelesmaticum). But Luther went a significant step farther, declaring a transference of the idiomata of the one nature to the other (genus majestaticum). This genus did not accept any diminution of the divine nature in the hypostatic union, though it did understand the human nature as participating in the divine attributes.<sup>140</sup> Karl Barth, describing this development, writes:

This impartation consists in the fact that in the hypostatic union which it encloses, there is such an appropriation, illumination and penetration, not of the divine nature by the human but of the human nature by the divine, that all the attributes of the divine nature of Jesus Christ may be ascribed also to His human nature. This does not, of course, involve a destruction or alternation of the human nature, but it means that this nature experiences the additional development (beyond its humanity) of acquiring and having as such all the marks of divinity, of participating directly in the majesty of God, of enjoying in its creatureliness every perfection of the uncreated essence of God. 141

Luther saw in the communicatio idiomatum a justification of his literal understanding of hoc est corpus meum,<sup>142</sup> with the final

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140 See Article VIII, 'The Formula of Concord,' THE BOOK OF CONCORD - THE CONFESSIONS OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH, ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), pp.486-92. For a modern Lutheran theology that rejects this doctrine, see Helmut Thielicke, THE EVANGELICAL FAITH - VOLUME TWO: THE DOCTRINE OF GOD AND OF CHRIST, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1977), p.326: 'In letting his original concern of faith lead him so far into speculation, Luther takes a fateful course.'

141 Barth, CD, IV - 2. p.77.

142 Torrance, SPACE, TIME AND INCARNATION, p.32.

deduction of the ubiquity of the body (or human nature) of Christ which plays a significant role in the Lutheran doctrine of the real presence,<sup>143</sup> but in using it he advanced into an unfortunate realm of speculative abstraction<sup>144</sup> that has some dangerous consequences. After raising the traditional Reformed objection ('does this not compromise both the true deity and the true humanity of Jesus Christ?'),<sup>145</sup> Barth asks:

But how are we to guard against a deduction which is very near the surface, which once it is seen is extremely tempting, and once accepted very easy to draw, but which can compromise at a single stroke nothing less than the whole of Christology? For after all, is not the humanity of Jesus Christ, by definition, that of all men? And even if it is said only of Him, does not this mean that the essence of all men, human essence as such, is capable of divinisation. If it can be said in relation to Him, why not to all men? 146

A door is thus left open by this 'heaven-storming doctrine of the humanity of the Mediator' which leads directly to the modern transition from theology to anthropology.<sup>147</sup>

In his christology lectures, Bonhoeffer declared that 'the genus majestaticum is the heart of Lutheran christology,' though he does not make his own position entirely clear. He recognizes the risks in this doctrine and expresses discomfort at the whole

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143 Thieliicke, THE EVANGELICAL FAITH - VOLUME TWO, p.326.

144 '... the fatal doctrine of the communicatio idiomatum, by means of which the statement of faith concerning the unity of the divine with the human was transformed into a metaphysical theory.' Emil Brunner, THE MEDIATOR - A STUDY OF THE CENTRAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), p.342.

145 Barth, CD, IV-2, p.79.

146 Ibid., p.81. See also Torrance, SPACE, TIME AND INCARNATION, p.41.

147 Ibid., p.83.

Reformed-Lutheran debate.<sup>148</sup> If in the end he seems only mildly to affirm it,<sup>149</sup> perhaps it is because he recognizes its dangerous proximity to the inadmissible question 'How?'

Apparently he managed to set aside his hesitation, however, for in a Christmas letter sent to former students and friends in 1939, he commends the doctrine of the genus majestaticum - 'the contribution of the Lutheran Church, added to the ancient Church's Christology.'<sup>150</sup> Citing the 'Formula of Concord' and Luther, he admits the incomprehensibility of the idea that human nature, which is our nature should share the properties of divinity, but is certain that 'this is scriptural doctrine, and it expresses the deepest and ultimate union of God with man . . .',<sup>151</sup>

If we have seemed to spend a disproportionate amount of space on this traditional Reformed-Lutheran debate (especially when Bonhoeffer so seldom mentions it directly!), it is because it is an important key that unlocks the door leading to a fuller understanding of the evolution in Bonhoeffer's thought. Recall what has been presented as central in his theology: Jesus Christ, the Incarnate One, is the concrete revelation of God himself; in him, reality - God's and humanity's - is structured; reality is the restored communion

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148 Bonhoeffer, CHRISTOLOGY, p.91.

149 Ibid., p.93.

150 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, TRUE PATRIOTISM - LETTERS, LECTURES AND NOTES 1939-45, ed. Edwin H. Robertson, trans. Edwin H. Robertson & John Bowden (London: Collins, 1973), p.32.

151 Ibid.

one experiences with God and his fellow human beings, and since this is accomplished in Christ, and to be in Christ is to be his Body, the place of the concrete structuring of reality is the Church. The Church has been distinct from the world in Bonhoeffer's thought up to this point, just as Christ himself, as the revelation of God to man, stands over against the world. But now questions emerge: Can one in fact meet Christ, God's reality, outside the Church?<sup>152</sup> What is the relationship between the world and reality? Are there not responsible human relationships outside the bounds of the visible Church? What can one make of the fact that the Confessing Church seemed to retreat into a self-protective posture, while men and women of the world boldly took responsibility for the guilt and demands of the evil hour, often sacrificing fortune, honour, and even life? And - most important - what does the incarnation of God in Christ mean for the reality of the sinful world? Was it not borne in his flesh and reconciled at the cross? Has only a portion of humanity entered the reality of God? Or has the incarnation abolished all distinctions, revealing in the God-Man one reality?

Bonhoeffer's insistence on the finitum capax infiniti and its doctrinal corollary, the genus majestaticum, now begins to bear fruit. If the finite human nature is capable of encompassing the infinite, and if God's reality has been communicated to the human

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152 Cf. Anderson, HISTORICAL TRANSCENDENCE AND THE REALITY OF GOD, p.85, and Phillips, THE FORM OF CHRIST IN THE WORLD, pp.69-70.

nature in the one person Jesus Christ, and if he, in assuming our nature, became our representative before God, then is not human nature as such capable of God's reality? Does not the incarnation, as Bonhoeffer understood it, lead one inexorably to the conclusion that in some way all humanity has been ontologically restructured and set into the one reality of God?

It is not surprising, therefore, to find a broadened horizon of incarnational reality in Bonhoeffer's ETHICS. If Bonhoeffer was concerned with the exclusiveness of Christ's lordship in THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP, the wide range of his lordship is the new emphasis of ETHICS.<sup>153</sup> Theologically, Bonhoeffer now took his stand on the incarnation, with all its implications for the world.

Bonhoeffer is really convinced that the incarnation has restored the whole of reality under one Head and that in Christ faith has a vision of the whole creation as it existed before God in the beginning and as it will be at the end.

All dualistic systems in terms of 'realms' and 'spheres' inevitably flounder upon this christological vision of the reconciliation of God and the world. 154

His concern is to show how God and the reality of this world are united in Jesus Christ.<sup>155</sup> No longer is the empirical Church presupposed as the reality of revelation; rather, he speaks in ETHICS of the wider range of God's revelation in Christ as it is manifest

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153 Bethge, DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, p.622.

154 Moltmann & Weissbach, TWO STUDIES IN THE THEOLOGY OF BONHOEFFER, p.61.

155 Dumas, DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, p.139.

among the creation.<sup>156</sup> 'He seeks to view every sphere of life as part of the world reconciled in Christ with God.'<sup>157</sup>

Bonhoeffer considered ETHICS his most important work.

Unfortunately, the course of events disallowed its completion, and we are left with the essays and fragments of several different attempts he made to understand the nature of the Christian life in this world. Eberhard Bethge has provided invaluable service in gathering these together (as is also the case in his compilation of the LETTERS AND PAPERS FROM PRISON), and if we are disappointed in not having a final, consistent manuscript from Bonhoeffer's hand, we are also grateful for the portions we do have as they point us in the direction his thought was moving.

The reader who goes to ETHICS hoping to find a helpful guide in the distinction between good and evil will be surprisingly turned away at the outset - or at least turned in another direction. Yes, ethical reflection strives to attain the knowledge of good and evil. Christian ethics, however, has as its first task the invalidation of this knowledge.<sup>158</sup> At his origin the human creature knows only one thing: God. In that singular knowledge he is a unity. But in grasping at the knowledge of good and evil his life is broken into disunity, for he becomes a god against God and a person in conflict himself, constantly summoning himself from the evil to the good through the voice of his

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156 Schmidt, 'The Cross of Reality?', p.230. So also Phillips, THE FORM OF CHRIST IN THE WORLD, p.139: In ETHICS 'Bonhoeffer's Christology is liberated from his ecclesiology.'

157 Moltmann & Weissbach, TWO STUDIES IN THE THEOLOGY OF BONHOEFFER, p.56.

158 Bonhoeffer, ETHICS, p.3.



conscience. Shame is the consequence, and the covering sought by men and women is but the attempt to overcome their fundamental disunion.<sup>159</sup> The ethical person, the one for whom the knowledge of good and evil has come to be of supreme importance, is fully revealed in the New Testament Pharisee. He is the man of disunion.<sup>160</sup> In contrast to him stands Jesus. He will not be drawn into his conflicts and countless decisions. He knows only one thing: the will of God. He thus lives freely and simply.<sup>161</sup>

For the Christian, then, it is not a matter of rational wrangling and reflection over good and evil. In Christ we are set free for a life of singular unity, freedom and simplicity. We look only to Jesus Christ and the will of God revealed in him. The consequence is that 'the more exclusively we acknowledge and confess Christ as our Lord, the more fully the wide range of His dominion will be disclosed to us.'<sup>162</sup> The present day has witnessed a breakdown of traditional ethical systems, and what is needed is not another system; rather, we must look to Christ alone in simplicity, and 'whoever sees Jesus Christ does indeed see God and the world in one. He can henceforward no longer see God without the world or the world without God.'<sup>163</sup>

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159 Ibid., pp.3-11.

160 Ibid., p.12.

161 Ibid., pp.13-15.

162 Ibid., p.41. Moltmann calls this 'the key to the unity of Bonhoeffer's thought which underlines the various themes in his writings.' . . Moltmann & Weissbach, TWO STUDIES IN THE THEOLOGY OF BONHOEFFER, p.56.

163 Ibid., p.51.



Looking to Christ in faith does not mean looking away from the world. Quite the contrary. In Christ we see the real world, and are set free to be real men and women. The reason for this is found solely in the incarnation of God.<sup>164</sup>

In ETHICS we feel a tension.<sup>165</sup> Clearly perceptible are the recurring notes of themes sounded in THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS, ACT AND BEING, and others of his writings. Yet there are, as it were, the first tentative phrases of a new melody in a different key - an overture promising more to come. Outward circumstances and the development of his incarnational theology modulated his thought into a new leitmotif, and this transition is fully recognizable in ETHICS. In the first part, Bonhoeffer identifies 'real man' as the man conformed to the Incarnate One,<sup>166</sup> but the distinctions this involves finally seem to give way to the overpowering thought that the Incarnate One has already conformed himself to real man. Following out the logic of the former idea, Bonhoeffer still has a place for an ontologically distinct Church. 'The Church, then, bears the form which is in truth the proper form of all humanity . . . . What takes place in her takes place as an example and substitute for all men.'<sup>167</sup> Therefore, the Church can be viewed as a section of humanity in which the form of Christ has concretely taken shape in this world.<sup>168</sup> Yet, if this is still the old melody, the cantus firmus, we begin to hear a counter-point, a contrasting descant.

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164 Ibid., pp.55-56.

165 So also Phillips, THE FORM OF CHRIST IN THE WORLD, pp.74-75.

166 Bonhoeffer, ETHICS, p.62.

167 Ibid., p.64.

168 Ibid.

In the fourth chapter, 'The Last Things And The Things Before The Last,'<sup>169</sup> Bonhoeffer explains that though God's gracious mercy is his final word, which includes a final judgment on all things penultimate, a certain amount of room is nevertheless left open for 'the things before the last.' 'The Christian life means neither a destruction nor a sanctioning of the penultimate.'<sup>170</sup> All things must finally be judged from the end, but precisely in the light of God's grace, the penultimate is upheld and given a concrete place, for creaturehood itself is a pre-condition for justification by faith and must, for the sake of the ultimate, be preserved.<sup>171</sup> In a similar manner, Bonhoeffer makes a place for the concept of the natural - a term generally discredited in Protestant ethics. 'The natural is that which, after the Fall, is directed towards the coming of Christ. The unnatural is that which, after the Fall, closes its doors against the coming of Christ.'<sup>172</sup> The natural will therefore endure by its inherent strength, for life and the reality of God are on its side.<sup>173</sup>

Thus the outlines of a new vision of reality are beginning to distinguish themselves in Bonhoeffer's thought. It is the view of the arms of the incarnational reality of God extended outward in a larger embrace.

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169 Ibid., pp.98-159.

170 Ibid., p.110.

171 Ibid., p.111.

172 Ibid., p.121.

173 Ibid., p.124.

By the fifth chapter, 'Christ, Reality and Good,'<sup>174</sup> Bonhoeffer finally breaks into the new tune.

In Christ we are offered the possibility of partaking in the reality of God and in the reality of the world, but not in the one without the other. The reality of God discloses itself only by setting me entirely in the reality of the world, and when I encounter the reality of the world it is already sustained, accepted and reconciled in the reality of God. This is the meaning of the revelation of God in the man Jesus Christ. 175

What this means, therefore, is that I cannot experience the reality of God without also experiencing the reality of the world, and I cannot experience the reality of the world without also experiencing the reality of God.<sup>176</sup> The presupposition that reality is divided into two spheres - holy and profane, sacred and secular - must emphatically be rejected. There is only one sphere of reality: Jesus Christ. In him we share at once in the reality of God and the reality of the world.<sup>177</sup> The incarnation means that just

as in Christ the reality of God entered into the reality of the world, so, too, is that which is Christian to be found only in that which is of the world, the 'supernatural' only in the natural, the holy only in the profane, and the revelation only in the rational. 178

When Bonhoeffer proceeds to raise the question whether or not there is a space for the Church that is separate from the world,

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174 Ibid., pp.161-84.

175 Ibid., p.167.

176 Ibid., p.168.

177 Ibid., pp.168-78.

178 Ibid., p.171.

we see clearly to what extent his thought has changed. In THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP, as was shown above, he affirms the need for space on earth for the Body of Christ as a consequence of the incarnation, and warns the Church that the world will seek to crowd it out.<sup>179</sup>

Actually, Bonhoeffer's own incarnational christology crowded it out, for in ETHICS he denies a space to the Church because the Church exists to bear witness to what is true for the whole world: 'It is the place where testimony is given to the foundation of all reality in Jesus Christ.'<sup>180</sup> Whether the world recognizes it or not, it is entirely the world of Christ. There is no part that belongs more to Christ than another, and 'no part of the world, be it never so forlorn and never so godless, which is not accepted by God and reconciled with God in Jesus Christ.'<sup>181</sup> If the Church is divided from the world, it is solely because she affirms in faith the reality which is the reality of the whole world.<sup>182</sup> The ontological distinction between Church and world that marked Bonhoeffer's earlier writings, is now exchanged for a cognitive distinction in the one ontological reality of God.

All of this is not to say, however, that the Church has no function in the world. It clearly has an important duty to fulfil as it bears witness in its proclamation and sacraments to the reality of God in Jesus Christ, but since the whole world is relative to Christ it must take its place along with other institutions which

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179 Bonhoeffer, THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP, pp.223, 240.

180 Bonhoeffer, ETHICS, p.174.

181 Ibid., p.177.

182 Ibid., p.178.

express the concrete will of God and provide spheres in which day-to-day obedience is realized.

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relativeness of the world to Christ assumes concrete form in certain mandates of God in the world. The Scriptures name four such mandates: labour, marriage, government and the Church. We speak of divine mandates rather than of divine orders because the word mandates refers more clearly to a divinely imposed task rather than to a determination of being. 183

The mandates are earthly agents, conferred with divine authority, through which God's commandment comes to us.<sup>184</sup> Because one lives by this commandment alone, there is freedom of movement and action, release from the uncertainties present in the fear of decision-making.<sup>185</sup> The corresponding concept to freedom is responsibility - each pre-supposing the other. The structure of the responsible life is life bound to other persons and to God, and this bond sets one in genuine freedom. The obligation to the other assumes the form of deputyship, after the manner of Jesus who lived as deputy for us. He was the responsible person. Deputyship, therefore, consists in the complete surrender of oneself to the other.<sup>186</sup>

Not only is the responsible life marked by deputyship; it takes action in accordance with reality. If Jesus Christ is the reality of God,

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183 Ibid., p.179. Later Bonhoeffer changes 'labour' to 'culture.' See pp.252ff. Moltmann refers to the mandates as 'spheres for the practice of obedience.' Moltmann & Weissbach, TWO STUDIES IN THE THEOLOGY OF BONHOEFFER, p.75.

184 Bonhoeffer, ETHICS, p.245.

185 Ibid., p.247.

186 Ibid., pp.194-96.

action in accordance with Christ is action corresponding to earthly reality. It allows the world to be the world, setting it free for a genuine worldliness, for in Jesus Christ the world is loved, condemned and reconciled by God.<sup>187</sup> Because of this relationship to Christ, the world remains the world. The responsible person does not overstep it and try to make it the Kingdom of God, nor can he piously be indolent in righteous self-concern. The responsible life recognizes the world as its concrete place of action, with all due recognition for realistic limitations and opportunities.<sup>188</sup>

Whereas Bonhoeffer's earlier thought led him to identify the Church as the place of christo-structured reality, an unmistakable evolution has transpired. The Incarnate One, as deputy for all creation, has received in his humanity the full reality of God (communicatio idiomatum). The door is barred to dualism and any form of particularism, and 'thus we recognize that Christ is thought of as the foundation of all reality and the One immanent in it all.'<sup>189</sup> Perhaps one way to accentuate the change is to put it this way: Bonhoeffer first stressed the fact that one encounters reality in Jesus Christ; now he seems to say, one encounters Jesus Christ in reality. 'All real and essential experience becomes in this way the experience of Jesus Christ as the real.'<sup>190</sup>

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187 Ibid., pp.199-200.

188 Ibid., pp.202-4.

189 Ott, REALITY AND FAITH, p.179.

190 Ibid., p.191.

It is from this perspective that we must seek to understand his final thoughts as preserved for us in LETTERS AND PAPERS FROM PRISON.<sup>191</sup>

Sadly, Bonhoeffer was not permitted to develop a thorough, systematic approach to the ideas that sprang out of the latter stages of his work on ETHICS. We are left instead with probing questions, a few suggestive notions that beg for elucidation, and whetted appetites that serve to heighten the outrage felt at the tragedy of his premature death. Careful exegesis, with one eye fixed on the text, and the other on what has preceded it, is necessary if we are to understand these fragments. Simply to repeat the contents of the letters in a chronological order will not further our understanding of Bonhoeffer. In order to enter into responsible dialogue with him, we must try to grasp the structure and movement of his thought. This will require some systematization, but hopefully only that which arises naturally from the text itself.

Fully in step with the theological cadence he set for himself, Bonhoeffer took a close look at reality from behind the bars of a Gestapo prison. Since Jesus Christ has united the reality of God with the reality of the world so that all real experience becomes an experience

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191 At the outset of any discussion of these disparate writings, the fragmentary nature of what we are dealing with should be recognized. Modern theology has perhaps unfairly put much emphasis on these brief ideas flashed forth from smuggled-out prison letters. Had their author lived to set out carefully his thoughts in a balanced way, they might have taken a very different form. Any statement about Bonhoeffer's theology of his last days is therefore qualified at the outset. We may speak of what he seemed to be saying, and, noting the movement of his thought from earlier works, indicate the direction it was apparently heading, but the situation behooves respectful caution.

of Christ, his vision naturally turned outward for a look at worldly reality.<sup>192</sup> In his attempt to comprehend this reality, Bonhoeffer tackled the problem in two different methodological ways: first, he examined the world empirically, and then he considered it theologically. Both approaches found their ultimate convergence in Jesus Christ, the one reality of God and humanity. What, then, was his discovery about reality considered (1) empirically, and (2) theologically? And (3) what did all this mean for the Church?

(1) In a letter to Eberhard Bethge dated April 30, 1944,<sup>193</sup> Bonhoeffer wrote: 'What is bothering me incessantly is the question what Christianity really is, or indeed who Christ really is, for us today.'<sup>194</sup> The emphasis in this sentence falls on the word 'today,' for it appeared to Bonhoeffer that he was living in a uniquely different time. The world had changed. People were no longer moved by theological and pious words. The day of inwardness and conscience was passed - 'and that means the time of religion in general.'<sup>195</sup> The questions relentlessly push his mind forward: How can Christ be Lord of the religionless? Are there religionless Christians? What does this change mean for the Church (community, sermon, liturgy) and an individual life? How can we speak about God in accordance with this new state of reality? What about prayer and worship in a religionless

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192 Bonhoeffer was greatly interested in the Old Testament at this time, for he found there a certain concrete, earthly reality. See Bonhoeffer, LPP, pp.156, 168-69, 336-37.

193 Ibid., pp.278-82. Bethge considers this letter evidence of a 'decisive new start.' See DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, p.763.

194 Bonhoeffer, LPP, p.279.

195 Ibid.





situation?<sup>196</sup> Does not the Pauline rejection of circumcision as a condition for justification by faith mean also that there is freedom from religion?<sup>197</sup>

What did Bonhoeffer mean by 'religion.' and what are we to make of his analysis that today is a religionless age? Gerhard Ebeling believes Bonhoeffer was concerned to free the Gospel from law,<sup>198</sup> and in a similar vein, T. F. Torrance sees here a radical affirmation of 'justification by grace alone over against man's own religious self-justification and self-security.'<sup>199</sup> The difficulty with these views, however, is their failure to account for the historical movement Bonhoeffer discerned.<sup>200</sup> His first concern is not a theological restatement of reformation theology. He is describing an empirically observable change of affairs. Religion is marked by metaphysics and individual inwardness. 'Neither of these is relevant to the biblical message or to the man of today.'<sup>201</sup>

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196 Ibid., pp.279-81.

197 Ibid., p.281.

198 Ebeling, WORD AND FAITH, p.142.

199 Torrance, GOD AND RATIONALITY, p.75. So also Hamilton, LIFE IN ONE'S STRIDE, p.58; and REVOLT AGAINST HEAVEN, pp.179-80. Cf. Woelfel, BONHOEFFER'S THEOLOGY, p.293, where Torrance is accused of a 'conservative domestication of Bonhoeffer.'

200 'An understanding and acceptance of the movement of history is behind the demand for religionless Christianity.' Phillips, THE FORM OF CHRIST IN THE WORLD, p.152.

201 Bonhoeffer, LLP, pp.285-86. One cannot help wondering, at this point, whether his analysis is factually correct. How are we to understand the present fascination with Transcendental Meditation, the occult, U.F.O's, life-after-death research, astrology, etc.? Have things changed that much in the last forty years?

A characteristic that tends to add confusion to our efforts to sort out the strands of Bonhoeffer's thought is his parallel concern about the nature of the Church's proclamation. As he is discovering an empirically demonstrable change in the present state of affairs (a religionless time), he is asking how one speaks clearly about the gospel in such a situation (non-religious interpretation).<sup>202</sup> As he sees it, Barth was the first to have begun the criticism of religion, but he failed to carry it through, substituting a 'positivist doctrine of revelation which says in effect, "Like it or lump it."<sup>203</sup> In other words, though Barth saw the theological dangers of religion, he failed to reinterpret the gospel's content in a way consistent with the present religionless situation. Also, for the same reason, he is interested in Bultmann's attempt at de-mythologizing, but finally must reject his approach as just another effort of liberal reductionism which fails to deal justly with the real content of the biblical message.<sup>204</sup> Bonhoeffer is thus easily vulnerable to misinterpretation, for when Barth speaks of religion he does have in view humanity's attempt at self-justification, and by association with him Bonhoeffer is understood as meaning the same thing. But his concern is very different. He observes a religionless age (something Barth would not have accepted), and asks how the gospel is to be appropriately proclaimed in this setting. Though Barth and Bultmann might have been of help, given their theological rejection of religion, they failed to translate

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202 Ibid., pp.280-81.

203 Ibid., pp.280, 286, 328. Cf. Regin Prenter, 'Bonhoeffer and Barth's Positivism of Revelation,' WORLD COME OF AGE, ed. Ronald Gregor Smith, pp.93-130.

204 Bonhoeffer, LPP, pp.285, 328-29.

theology into a non-religious language which would have been in accordance with the present religionlessness.

By studying the reality of this world, what did Bonhoeffer discover? He saw a world that had 'come of age'<sup>205</sup> through an historical movement toward autonomy. Though not wanting to get into a debate about the exact date, he writes:

The movement that began about the thirteenth century. . . towards the autonomy of man (in which I should include the discovery of the laws by which the world lives and deals with itself in science, social and political matters, art, ethics, and religion) has in our time reached an undoubted completion. Man has learnt to deal with himself in all questions of importance without recourse to the 'working hypothesis' called 'God' . . . . As in the scientific field, so in human affairs generally, 'God' is being pushed more and more out of life, losing more and more ground. 206

The world has become self-confident. Certainly there have been failures (like the present war), but these do not cause the world to question its course.<sup>207</sup>

At this point Bonhoeffer is reporting more than editorializing. Impartially considered, the reality of the world has become religionless. Unfortunately, it is also a fact that Christianity has not always acted in accordance with reality. Clinging to metaphysical dualism, religious people are constantly on the retreat, able to speak about God only when knowledge or human resources have come to an end. God is for them the deus ex machina who provides the apparent solution to insoluble problems.<sup>208</sup> This means two things: God will always be

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205 Ibid., p.328.

206 Ibid., pp.325-26. See also pp.359-60.

207 Ibid., p.326.

208 Ibid., p.282.

on the boundaries of life, rather than at the centre,<sup>209</sup> and as our understanding increases, God will be pushed more and more out of the picture - a stop-gap for the incompleteness of our knowledge,<sup>210</sup> In fact, this has happened, and Christian apologetics has had to struggle to reserve a space for God by attacking the adulthood of the world. As its special tools it has used existential philosophy and psychotherapy to work out some ingenious methods to make persons in the world come of age realize they really need God - even though they may not know it.<sup>211</sup> This assault on the world's new maturity, however, is pointless, ignoble, and unchristian.

Pointless, because it seems like an attempt to put a grown-up man back into adolescence, i.e. to make him dependent on things on which he is, in fact, no longer dependent, and thrusting him into problems that are, in fact, no longer problems to him. Ignoble because it amounts to an attempt to exploit man's weakness for purposes that are alien to him and to which he has not freely consented. Unchristian because it confuses Christ with one particular stage in man's religiousness, i.e. with human law. <sup>212</sup>

So we should frankly face the facts about the reality of the world, and 'recognize that the world, and people, have come of age . . . .',<sup>213</sup>

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209 Ibid., cf. Bonhoeffer, CHRISTOLOGY, p.60, and CREATION AND FALL, pp.49-50.

210 Bonhoeffer, LPP, pp.311-12.

211 Ibid., p.341.

212 Ibid., p.327.

213 Ibid., p.346. Cf. Hamilton, LIFE IN ONE'S STRIDE, p.60: 'Perhaps the major ambiguity present in Bonhoeffer's last phase of thought lies in his apparent implicit acceptance of a progressive view of history (a view he explicitly rejects) through his use of the term "man come of age."' Indeed, it is this that has caused Bonhoeffer's interpreters such difficulty, but the ambiguity rests, in my judgment in the failure to distinguish between the two approaches, empirical and theological, that Bonhoeffer finds converging in Jesus Christ.

(2) Because the Incarnate One has bound into a single unity the reality of God and the reality of the world, Bonhoeffer is free to examine the worldly realm, from the mundane to the momentous, and if he discovers certain facts, such as its religionlessness, then these must have a parallel theological explanation; there are not two spheres, one holy and one profane, but a single arena of reality encompassing both God and humanity. This means that if his empirico-historical assessment of the world's movement towards autonomy locates its rise in the thirteenth century, 'his understanding of faith enables him, and compels him, to place this movement in the very heart of Christianity.'<sup>214</sup> Advancing to the theological perspective, Bonhoeffer writes:

So our coming of age leads us to a true recognition of our situation before God. God would have us know that we must live as men who manage our lives without him. The God who is with us is the God who forsakes us (Mark 15.34). The God who lets us live in the world without the working hypothesis of God is the God before whom we stand continually. Before God and with God we live without God. God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us. Matt. 8.17 makes it quite clear that Christ helps us, not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by virtue of his weakness and suffering. 215

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214 Ronald Gregor Smith, SECULAR CHRISTIANITY (London: Collins, 1966), p.180. Thus I think Kenneth Hamilton is far from correct when he writes: 'It is quite mistaken to imagine that he regarded "secularization" as having decidedly Christian roots.' . . . LIFE IN ONE'S STRIDE, p.57.

215 Bonhoeffer, LPP, p.360.

This is a critical passage - clearly the fulfilment of what has preceded it and the clue to what follows. The world's coming of age has a theological basis, for it is grounded in the reality of God. What is the inner meaning of the world's experience? It is the experience of Christ on the cross. From the premise that God's reality and the world's reality are united in the Incarnate One, and by comparing this premise with the actual contemporary state of the world, Bonhoeffer makes some important deductions: the reality of God granted us is Christ crucified; the reality of our present age is the experience of godforsakenness, i.e., Christ crucified. 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' is the cry of reality - both God's and the world's. The God before whom we live is at once the forsaking God and the forsaken God, and the world in which we live is both abandoned by God and the reality of God in his abandonment. The world come of age is the experience of the cross of Jesus Christ. Its autonomy and loss of God result from the actual godforsakenness of Christ; yet because Christ is the Son of God, it is also the experience of God himself in weakness and suffering.

Bonhoeffer looked at man in his day and saw in the spirit humanity going forward to 'a completely religionless time.' And there came upon him, as it were, with elemental power the final meaning of what was happening, that it was the Passion of Christ himself which was taking place in our time! God permits himself anew to be nailed to the Cross for the salvation of man; he chooses helplessness for our sakes. The Crucified makes himself present anew as the Crucified for our sakes. This thought took a strong hold upon Bonhoeffer. 216

Here is the final flowering of an incarnational christology rooted in the finitum capax infiniti and communicatio idiomatum. Humanity can encompass the reality of God, according to Bonhoeffer, and the attributes of God himself can be communicated to human nature. In Jesus Christ the Incarnate One, God and the world were united into a single reality. This does not mean they are identical, but it does mean that when one experiences the reality of this world, one enters into the experience of God himself. In our time, the attribute communicated to human nature is not the omnipotence and power of God, but his weakness and suffering. This is the reality we undergo as we participate in the event of Calvary; it is ours in Jesus Christ.

(3) Throughout his life Bonhoeffer summoned the Church to enter reality, to dismount from its miserable hack, throw down its rusty sword, and give up fighting windmills as if they were giants. And this was his call to the end. Having identified reality as the cross of Christ, he issued again the plea:

Man is summoned to share in God's sufferings at the hands of a godless world. He must therefore really live in the godless world, without attempting to gloss over its ungodliness in some religious way or another. He must live a 'secular' life, and thereby share in God's sufferings . . . . It is not the religious act that makes a Christian, but participation in the sufferings of God in the secular life. That is metanoia: not in the first place thinking about one's own needs, problems, sins, and fears, but allowing oneself to be caught up into the way of Jesus Christ, into the messianic event, thus fulfilling Isa. 53. 217

The Christian is profoundly this-worldly;<sup>218</sup> that is to say, one who

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217 Bonhoeffer, LPP, pp.361-62.

218 Ibid., p.369.



enters the reality of Jesus Christ, the reality of the godforsaken world. In Christ, he participates in both the silent suffering of God and the self-giving sacrifice of the Son. This is, it seems to me, the way we can achieve at least a partial understanding of Bonhoeffer's notion of the 'secret discipline.'<sup>219</sup>

His view of the Church has undergone quite a transformation along the way of his theological pilgrimage. Whereas he first understood it as the place of reality, now it has become for him an incognito presence in the one reality of God and world - a discipline of silence that will in some way protect the mysteries of the faith.<sup>220</sup> Bonhoeffer is frank that he is not exactly sure what the Church will be like in the new world situation, but is certain it will need to hold its tongue until a new, perhaps non-religious, language emerges.<sup>221</sup> In the meantime, the Christian life will be marked by 'prayer and righteous action.'<sup>222</sup>

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219 Ibid., pp.281, 286, 300.

220 Ibid., p.286.

221 Ibid., p.300. Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, I LOVED THIS PEOPLE, trans. Keith R. Crim (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1965), pp.49-50, where, in a fragment from a play written in prison, Bonhoeffer wrote: 'I tell you to guard from misuse the great words which have been given to man. They do not belong in the mouth of the masses and in the headlines of the newspapers, but in the hearts of the few who will guard and protect them with their lives.'

222 Bonhoeffer, LPP, p.300.



Bethge stated it well when he commented:

It is a disturbing thing for the Church that at the end of his theological activity Bonhoeffer gives us no completed ecclesiology that we can get hold of, but leaves this, of all things, entirely open. 223

Clearly, Bonhoeffer was pointing the way to something new - something that would need much careful thought. We are left with a feeling of incompleteness and are not quite sure what to do with the Church after Bonhoeffer has argued so forcefully for the one reality of God that admits no barriers or distinctions between separate spheres. We can place the 'secret discipline' within the general structure of his thought, however, and by that perhaps provide some illumination.

Consider, first, the silence. If Christians enter the reality of God and experience the contemporary suffering of Christ on the cross, then that means they will participate in the rejection God endures by allowing himself to be pushed out of the world and ignored. 'Christians stand by God in his hour of grieving.'<sup>224</sup> They will enter into the suffering silence of the one who was oppressed and afflicted yet opened not his mouth (Is. 53.7). Given the non-religious change in affairs, the Church is not really sure yet how to express the mysteries of the faith, anyway. So from the fact of its participation

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223 Bethge, DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, p.790. Cf. Ronald Gregor Smith, THE NEW MAN - CHRISTIANITY AND MAN'S COMING OF AGE (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1956), p.104. Here Smith vastly over-values the 'secret discipline' when he writes: 'This is the heart of his thought.'

224 Bonhoeffer, LPP, p.349.

in the reality of the suffering God, and from the standpoint of its uncertainties about proclamation, the silence of the Church itself becomes a witness.

As to righteous action, that too is the result of participating in the reality of God. It is 'allowing oneself to be caught up into the way of Jesus Christ.'<sup>225</sup> At the cross, God revealed himself in Christ to be a God of love who sacrifices himself for others. In Christ, where his reality is made concrete for us, his transcendence is his 'being there for others.' In notes outlining a proposed book, Bonhoeffer wrote:

Who is God? Not in the first place an abstract belief in God, in his omnipotence etc. That is not a genuine experience of God but a partial extension of the world. Encounter with Jesus Christ. The experience that a transformation of all human life is given in the fact that 'Jesus is there only for others.' His 'being there for others' is the experience of transcendence. It is only this 'being there for others,' maintained till death, that is the ground of his omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. Faith is participation in this being of Jesus (incarnation, cross and resurrection). Our relation to God is not a 'religious' relationship to the highest, most powerful, and best Being imaginable - that is not authentic transcendence - but our relation to God is a new life in 'existence for others,' through participation in the being of Jesus. 226

The Christian is the one who has faith in Jesus, which is to say, the one who has entered God's reality in him. The current historical experience of that reality is the cross. One aspect of this is the

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225 Ibid., p.361.

226 Ibid., p.381.

godforsakenness of modern secularity (with all the suffering and silence this will entail for the Church), and the second is the this-worldly transcendence of God in Christ as the man for others. The cross reveals God's surrender to the needs of others, a sacrifice encompassing transcendence. Hence, to enter into Christ, to participate in his being, is to share in the authentic transcendence of 'being there for others.'<sup>227</sup> 'The church is the church only when it exists for others.'<sup>228</sup> Its self-giving should be concrete, as concrete as Christ himself. Therefore, as a start, the Church should 'give away all its property to those in need,'<sup>229</sup> The identity of the Church of religionless Christianity is this: 'being herself in not wanting anything for herself.'<sup>230</sup>

Into one sphere of reality, Jesus has united, by his incarnation, God and human life. The reality of this world is the reality of God. If this world is apparently godless, then it is because God has granted to us this experience of his reality - the experience of the cross.

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227 'Encounter with the "being of Jesus for others" is the experience of transcendence - this worldly transcendence. There can be no doubt that Bonhoeffer finally has committed himself wholeheartedly to the kind of Lutheran development Barth deplored, with all its risks. The finite world is capable of the infinite: this world bears the other world, and it does so in Christ's absolute givenness "for others."' Phillips, THE FORM OF CHRIST IN THE WORLD, p.197.

228 Bonhoeffer, LPP, p.382.

229 Ibid.

230 Bethge, BONHOEFFER - EXILE AND MARTYR, p.153.

Thus faith leads us into the reality of God's suffering in the world. We share in his godforsakenness through our secularity and the silent discipline we maintain about the mysteries of faith. Faith also leads us to participate in the reality of the cross through being-for-others, for at the cross the transcendence of God was revealed concretely in Jesus, the man for others. Participation in his being is righteous action - sacrifice for others.

### C. The Triumph of Reality

By tracing the route of Bonhoeffer's short but significant theological pilgrimage, we have seen a theology evolve through different stages, yet remain christocentric throughout. With unwavering consistency Bonhoeffer endeavoured to grasp the meaning of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. In the Incarnate, Crucified, and Resurrected One, he saw a God who has restructured reality, uniting himself to, and transforming, the reality of the world. Through Christ, God entered our world of space and time, and thus his is not simply a spiritual presence, but fully concrete and visible. Where is the place of Jesus Christ in this world? Bonhoeffer, at the beginning of his career, pointed to the Church; at the end, to the world. What was it about his theology that led to this change? The answer is found, not in a basic christological change, but in the progressive working-out of a christology grounded firmly in a distinctively Lutheran incarnationism.

At the outset of his theological labours, Bonhoeffer identified the Church as the place of Jesus Christ on earth. It was, he thought, the sphere of restructured reality. The Confessing Church struggle provided an arena in which his theology found clear expression and, at the same time, met its limitations. Throughout this period he emphasized the ontological distinctiveness of the Church. Because it is the fellowship of God's people called out of darkness into light, it is not afraid to face boldly the question

of boundaries. It has a space in this world, and when its proclamation is met with resistance, it joins battle in confessional witness, thereby marking its boundaries as an act of love for the world. But a question emerged: Can one encounter Christ outside the bounds of the Church? In his activity in the resistance movement, Bonhoeffer encountered men and women of the world who fully accepted the reality of the tragic days in which they lived, and, with sacrifice, accepted responsibility for it - a fact which must have added urgency to this question.

The answer came from the centre of his theology itself. The boundaries were pushed back, like rippling waves moving forth in wider circles from a splash in the middle of a pond. The centre remained Jesus Christ, but as Bonhoeffer logically followed the impulse of his understanding of the incarnation, the sphere of God's restructured reality moved from the Church to the world.<sup>231</sup>

Working with the corollary premises, finitum capax infiniti and the genus majestaticum, Bonhoeffer finally rejected all dualism. In Jesus Christ the finite received the infinite: the reality of God

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231 Cf. Anderson, HISTORICAL TRANSCENDENCE AND THE REALITY OF GOD, pp.77-98, and Hamilton, LIFE IN ONE'S STRIDE, p.59, for explanations about the change in Bonhoeffer which identify it as his new concern for the Church's relationship to the world, after having established its identity in the world. This mission emphasis does not account for the loss of boundaries between the Church and world, and the theological affirmation of the historical movement toward secularism as the contemporary experience of God's reality.

was communicated to the reality of this world, the two becoming a single unity, and in that one reality, God and the world are ontologically united in such a way that divine transcendence is this-worldly, and worldliness itself an experience of the reality of God.

In the unfolding of this incarnational approach what happened to Bonhoeffer's conception of the Church? How are we to understand the change from an early emphasis on its uniqueness, its separation from the world as the place of Jesus Christ, to his final thoughts about a somewhat enigmatic 'secret discipline' in the one reality of God? André Dumas asks:

Did Bonhoeffer give up an attempt to interpret Christ and the church in concrete terms, and was he convinced that only an 'anonymous Christianity' (immersed in the secularity of the world and living a sort of double life between existence for others in a godless world and the 'secret discipline' before God and with God) could now correspond to the form that the presence of Christ in reality ought to take? Did he feel that the concretizing of the church was a hindrance to the human freedom of Christ, understood as this-worldly transcendence? 232

Though acknowledging that these questions must be left open, since only Bonhoeffer himself could offer an explanation as to where his thought was leading, Dumas believes it would be very surprising if this interpretation corresponded to his ongoing task.<sup>233</sup> He argues that 'from a supposed evolution in Bonhoeffer's thought one might infer the surrender of spatial christology, concrete ecclesiology.'<sup>234</sup>

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232 Dumas, DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, p.230.

233 Ibid.

234 Ibid., p.231.

However, this could not be the case, in his judgment, for Bonhoeffer would then have suffered defeat in his battle for God in the midst of reality, since it would entail a final diminution of God's reality - 'a new dualism between the visibility of the world and the invisibility of faith.'<sup>235</sup>

Perhaps, though, Dumas has missed the point. Has not Bonhoeffer so identified God with the reality of the world that any diminution of God's reality, through an invisible faith or any other means, is rendered logically impossible? If the incarnational triumph of the one reality has so completely annihilated its opposing dualism, then the result is that however invisible faith - or even the Church - may be, God's reality will always be as visible and concrete as the world in which we live.

This is not to say that one can see in the prison letters a final destruction of all distinction between Church and world. There remains the arcane discipline, and 'this means he had no intention of simply including the religionless world within the Church or making the Church and the world the same thing.'<sup>236</sup> Nevertheless, it must also be said that this concept seems to be held in tension with the general thrust of this theology - a pause, as it were, before following his theological journey to the end. Admitting that for Bonhoeffer there remained a place (though not clearly defined) for the Church in the world, may we not legitimately ask, however, whether the movement of his thought was such that it

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235 Ibid.

236 Bethge, DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, p.785. See also Bethge, BONHOEFFER - EXILE AND MARTYR, pp.150-51, and Godsey, THE THEOLOGY OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, p.271.



inevitably demands a releasing of even this minimal view of the Church's distinctiveness as a piece of baggage no longer useful in the world's pilgrimage to a fully christocentric secularity? Has not Bonhoeffer's ontological uniting of the reality of God and the reality of the world pulled the foundation stones out from under any wall marking off the Church as fundamentally different from the world?

Though Dumas, it seems to me, has not sufficiently grasped the full ecclesiological implications in Bonhoeffer's incarnationism, he has pin-pointed the central difficulty, i.e., his Lutheran emphasis 'in which the incarnation is in danger of ceasing to be the word of revelation to reality and of being transformed into the ongoing structure of reality.'<sup>237</sup> In this ontological realism, Christ ceased to be the revelatory Word of God and becomes, as it were, a polyphonic presence in the midst of the world around us, 'as though the incarnation has transformed Christ into the Dionysius of the earth.'<sup>238</sup> Those who would defend Bonhoeffer to the end must finally answer this objection. It is significant that Bonhoeffer views the 'secret discipline' as a silent affair. Though he was concerned at one point with the problems of speech in a non-religious age, at the end he left no real place for proclamation in the Church's life; prayer and righteous action - yes, but not preaching. The Word which encounters us, at times over against our will, calling

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237 Dumas, DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, p.235.

238 Ibid., p.273.

us to turn from the poverty of our proud autonomy, becomes a devalued commodity in a theological market-place which has as its monetary standard an incarnationalism which grants worth to the world's independence, discovering in it the riches of a mature freedom before God. When the vertical dimension of transcendence is swallowed up in an horizontal this-worldliness, objective encounter is ruled out in favour of participation. For Bonhoeffer, one participates experientially in the ontological reality of God - a reality which is one with the reality of the world. Thus, for example, the experience of this world's secular autonomy is actually participation in God's experience of the cross. The crucifixion of Christ ceases to be a Word of judgment and reconciliation addressed to the world; instead, it becomes a kind of principle<sup>239</sup> that explains the experience of modern life.

This leads to a second observation: not only has Bonhoeffer's incarnationalism led to an abandonment of any ontological distinction between Church and world, it has finally resulted in an a-historical theology. This is particularly ironic, given Bonhoeffer's urgent desire to grasp fully the historical and empirical reality

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239 'The Crucified makes himself present anew as the Crucified for our sakes. This thought took a strong hold upon Bonhoeffer. He sought to make it a kind of "principle"; perhaps this had to be "the starting point for secular interpretation."' Ott, REALITY AND FAITH, p.111.

of the world.<sup>240</sup> In spite of all his concern for the concrete reality of the world, his theologia crucis appears, at the end, to be based more on a principle than an event in space and time in which God acted extra nos on our behalf, once and for all.<sup>241</sup> Given the fact that God and the world became a unity in his incarnationalism, Bonhoeffer was, in effect, compelled to find a theological rationale for the present secularity of the world. The cross provided the interpretative principle, and accordingly, the contemporary experience of godlessness was seen by him to be nothing less than participation in the godforsakenness of the cross; that is, the experience of his reality God grants to us in our time is the Passion of Christ. But notice: in taking this step,

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240 Though I take a somewhat different approach, I am partially indebted to Hans Schmidt's article, 'The Cross of Reality?', WORLD COME OF AGE, ed. Ronald Gregor Smith, pp.215-55. He points out Bonhoeffer's return to the non-redemptive-historical Yahwehism of Israelite Wisdom literature. Cf. also Bonhoeffer, CREATION AND FALL, p.68, where Bonhoeffer describes the serpent's 'Did God say?' as a thoroughly religious question in which evil was making claim to be the power behind the Word of God. 'On the basis of an idea, a principle, some previously gained knowledge about God, man is now to judge God's concrete Word.'

241 Cf. the language of The Letter to the Hebrews:  
 '. . .he entered once for all in the Holy Place. . .'  
 (9:12) 'But as it is, he has appeared once for all  
 at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice  
 of himself. And just as it is appointed for men to die  
 once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having  
 been offered once to bear the sins of many. . .'(9:26-27)  
 '. . .We have been sanctified through the offering  
 of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.' (10:10)  
 '. . .Christ had offered for all time a single  
 sacrifice. . .'(10:12) 'For by a single offering he has  
perfected for all time those who are sanctified.' (10:14)

Bonhoeffer has pulled the rug out from under a concrete, historical, substitutionary atonement. Whereas the New Testament speaks of Christ's death in the aorist past tense, Bonhoeffer translates it into the present. Whereas the apostolic witness points to one who stood in our place, thus securing our redemption, Bonhoeffer has us undergoing ourselves the ultimate curse of sin: abandonment by God. We must therefore ask whether Bonhoeffer's theology finally leads to an undermining of the sola gratia. If the world itself experiences Christ's godforsakenness, then is it not, in a sense, its own saviour? Bonhoeffer himself would never have gone this far, but that is inconsequential to the question whether his final theological position does not actually lead in that direction. That Bonhoeffer stopped short of this final step is a confirmation of his loyalty to Scripture and basic Reformation theology, but it is not necessarily a witness to his theological consistency. If divine reality and human reality have become so ontologically united that humanity is presently enduring the wrath of God against sin, then is not humanity at least a co-labourer in its own salvation?<sup>242</sup>

There remains this final animadversion: it appears that for all his efforts to place God at the centre,<sup>243</sup> Bonhoeffer is finally

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242 Certainly there is a sense in which the New Testament calls us to participate in Christ's sufferings (as e.g., Paul in Phil. 3:10), but it is clearly referring to a present identification with an historically accomplished event. By faith, Christ's once-for-all death has become my death, and in him I endure the cross, but only in him. Because he is my representative, I die the death I deserve. Bonhoeffer seems to have lost the critical element of substitution, in so far as Christ's Passion is understood as an interpretation principle for the world's present experience.

243 See Bonhoeffer, CREATION AND FALL, pp.73, 85, 93; CHRISTOLOGY, p.60; and LPP, p.282.

guilty of locating him at the limits of human experience. 'The God who is with us,' he wrote, 'is the God who forsakes us . . . . God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross.'<sup>244</sup> The present godlessness of the world is but an experience of the fact that God has allowed himself to be 'pushed out of the world.' God, therefore, is no longer at the centre, but marginal - the One who is limited by his weakness and suffering at the hands of this world.

The 'Cross of Reality' led to a misunderstanding of the cross of Jesus Christ. Because for Bonhoeffer this world appeared to be left to its own resources precisely through the word of God, God could no longer be thought of by him as the one who does his work in and with the world, but only as its last limit. 245

By pursuing his incarnational presuppositions to the end, namely, the finitum capax infiniti and genus majestaticum of his Lutheran tradition, Bonhoeffer married together the realities of God and the world in such a way that the union gave birth to a theology which came very close in the end to having a world without the Church, and even finally, without God.

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244 Bonhoeffer, LPP, p.360.

245 Schmidt, 'The Cross of Reality?', p.253.

## CHAPTER II

## THE LOSS OF DISTINCTION FROM ABOVE:

TRANSCENDENCE AND BEING IN THE  
THEOLOGY OF PAUL TILLICH

I want to tell you now about the insects to whom God gave 'sensual lust' . . . . I am that insect, brother, and it is said of me specially. All we Karamazovs are such insects, and, angel as you are, that insect lives in you, too, and will stir up a tempest in your blood. Tempests, because sensual lust is a tempest - worse than a tempest! Beauty is a terrible and awful thing! It is terrible because it has not been fathomed, for God sets us nothing but riddles. Here the boundaries meet and all contradictions exist side by side. I am not a cultivated man, brother, but I've thought a lot about this. It's terrible what mysteries there are! 246

Torn by the tempestuous yet mysterious beauty of his sensuality, Dostoevsky's Dmitri Karamazov saw his life as the place where 'boundaries meet and all contradictions exist side by side.' Similarly, when Paul Tillich was asked to give an account of the development of his ideas, he wrote: 'I thought that the concept of the boundary might be the fitting symbol for the whole of my personal and intellectual development.'<sup>247</sup> This self-analysis serves as a fitting introduction to the thought of one of the most influential theologians of this century - provided we keep in mind the fact that boundaries not only designate divisions, but more importantly (for Tillich's thought at least), mark the places where

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246 Fyodor Dostoevsky, THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV, trans. Constance Garnett (London: William Heinemann, 1912), p.106.

247 Paul Tillich, ON THE BOUNDARY - AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH (London: Collins, 1967), p.13.

different realms adjoin. His mind seemed to be situated on the borderlands linking nineteenth century idealism with twentieth century existentialism, philosophy with theology, and morality, culture, and politics with religion. Beyond his varied intellectual interests, moreover, Tillich himself was a boundary, uniting, as it were, the brothers Karamazov in his own life: he singularly combined the intellectual rigour of an Ivan, the passionate eros of a Dmitri, and the spiritual mysticism of an Alyosha.

Like Bonhoeffer, Paul Tillich was personally touched by some of the human suffering which followed in the wake of the Nazi Party's crushing drive for totalitarian power. Fortunately, Tillich did not lose his life, but he was among the first professors dismissed from university positions when Hitler came to power in 1933.<sup>248</sup> His book THE SOCIALIST DECISION<sup>249</sup> was an unequivocal rejection of Nazi ideology, but, as it turned out, was published too late to have any noticeable influence on current affairs. 'When Hitler

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248 In addition to ON THE BOUNDARY, Tillich wrote two other autobiographical sketches: see 'Author's Introduction' in Paul Tillich, THE PROTESTANT ERA, trans. James Luther Adams (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948), pp.IX-XXIX; and Paul Tillich, 'Autobiographical Reflections,' in THE THEOLOGY OF PAUL TILlich, ed. Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall (New York: Macmillan, 1952), pp.3-21. The most comprehensive biographical study of Tillich is Wilhelm and Marion Pauck, PAUL TILlich - HIS LIFE AND THOUGHT (London: Collins, 1977). Equally interesting, though understandably less objective, is Hannah Tillich, FROM TIME TO TIME (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1974).

249 Paul Tillich, THE SOCIALIST DECISION, trans. Franklin Sherman (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

came to dictatorial power it was promptly banned and the publishers forbidden to circulate it.<sup>250</sup> Among other things, the book placed him high on the new regime's list of enemies and inevitably led to his academic dismissal. Germany's loss, however, was America's gain, as Tillich accepted a post with combined teaching responsibilities at Union Theological Seminary and Columbia University. The United States became 'home' for the Tillichs, and thus arose the anomaly of a major German theologian whose chief works had to be translated from English into German.

To explain Tillich's theological method, we would do well to return to the notion of the boundary, and add yet one more geographical image: the mountain. If we can imagine standing on a boundary, and, at the same time, on the summit of the highest mountain, we have a good picture of Tillich's approach to theology. From the heights, he has a panoramic view of reality: on the one side, he looks down into the depths of human existence, and on the other, he surveys the truths of eternity. 'Theology,' he writes, 'moves back and forth between two poles, the eternal truth of its foundation and the temporal situation in which the eternal truth must be received.'<sup>251</sup> Theology must therefore own up to its apologetic task; it must be 'answering theology.' 'It answers the questions implied in the

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250 Pauck, PAUL TILlich - HIS LIFE AND THOUGHT, p.128.

251 Paul Tillich, SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY - Vol.I  
(Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), p.3.  
(hereafter cited as ST I).



"situation" in the power of the eternal message and with the means provided by the situation whose questions it answers.'<sup>252</sup> Thus the theologian must constantly balance between two poles, or - in our imagery - must look out from the mountain into two different realms. It was a great mistake of kerygmatic theology, Tillich believes, to fix its gaze solely upon revelation, without correlating it with 'a courageous participation in the "situation," that is, in all the various cultural forms which express modern man's interpretation of his existence.'<sup>253</sup> Tillich sets out to redress the imbalance, explaining his approach in this way:

. . . . it is necessary to seek a theological method in which message and situation are related in such a way that neither of them is obliterated . . . . The following system is an attempt to use the 'method of correlation' as a way of uniting message and situation. It tries to correlate the questions implied in the situation with the answers implied in the message. It does not derive the answers from the questions as a self-defying apologetic theology does. Nor does it elaborate answers without relating them to the questions as a self-defying kerygmatic theology does. It correlates questions and answers, situations and message, human experience and divine manifestation. 254

So this is the method: Tillich intends to look at one moment into the 'situation' of contemporary human existence, and the next into the adjoining province of the eternal message. And this is the place: he must position himself on the boundary, and at a sufficient

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252 Ibid., p.6.

253 Ibid., p.5.

254 Ibid., p.8.

elevation to see clearly into both the dominion of humanity and the dominion of God.

But what shall guide him in the use of his method? Tillich lists two formal criteria: first, 'the object of theology is what concerns us ultimately,'<sup>255</sup> and second, 'our ultimate concern is that which determines our being or not being.'<sup>256</sup> With a vast panorama of God and humanity spread before him, and thus also infinite possibilities for contemplation, the theologian's vision is specifically directed to look beyond preliminary concerns and focus solely on those things which are of 'ultimate concern.' And a concern is 'ultimate' if it has to do with that which has the power of threatening or saving our being.

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255 Ibid., p.12.

256 Ibid., p.14.

## A. A Panoramic View

Tillich's entire theological system is structured according to the 'method of correlation'; the question - answer dialectic is its formal organizing principle. Thus his theology is organized into five major questions correlated with five major answers: the question of reason, and the answer of revelation; the question of being, and the answer of God; the question of existence, and the answer of Christ; the question of life, and the answer of the Spirit; the question of history, and the answer of the kingdom of God.<sup>257</sup> The boundary situation in which he has placed himself has provided an excellent vantage-point from which to examine human existence. From this view, five central questions emerge. For the answers, he turns and looks - where? He has already laid down the general guidelines the theologian must be governed by 'ultimate concern.' But now the inevitable question of authority is raised. Granted that ultimate answers are what the theologian seeks, how is he to know which answers are authoritative?

In identifying the sources from which the answers emerge for systematic correlation with the 'situation,' Tillich lists several. The Bible, of course, is an important source, even 'the basic' because 'it is the original document about the events on which the Christian church is founded.'<sup>258</sup> However, it is not the only source, as

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257 These pairs of questions and answers form the five parts of Tillich's SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY. Parts I and II comprise ST I. Part III is SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY - Vol.II (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957) (hereafter cited as ST II), and Parts IV and V of the system make up SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY - Vol.III (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963) (hereafter cited as ST III). This chapter will focus principally upon Tillich's SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY. Finished at the end of his career, it forms the final and most comprehensive presentation of his thought.

258 Tillich, ST I, p.35.

'neo-orthodox biblicism' asserts. 'The biblical message cannot be understood and could not have been received had there been no preparation for it in human religion and culture.'<sup>259</sup> And furthermore, the biblical message presupposes a receiving Church. Therefore, the history of the Church and dogma, and even the history of religion and culture, are important sources for systematic theology.<sup>260</sup> Thus, the survey of the sources shows 'their almost unlimited richness.'<sup>261</sup> Certainly there are 'degrees of importance' in these sources, the most important bearing a more direct relationship to the 'central event on which the Christian faith is based, the appearance of the New Being in Jesus as the Christ,'<sup>262</sup> but the multiplicity of sources indicates the intellectual openness required of the theologian.<sup>263</sup>

The various sources are gathered up by the theologian and mediated through his experience. Experience itself is not a source, but is the necessary medium through which the sources speak to us.<sup>264</sup> Though experience receives and does not produce, it does have the power to transform what is given to it. Thus Tillich is anxious to avoid two extremes: the restriction of the mediatorial influence of

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259 Ibid., p.34.

260 Ibid., pp.36-38.

261 Ibid., p.40.

262 Ibid.

263 This openness readily reveals itself in Tillich's system and is shown by his amazing breadth of interests. He is as quick to call up a quotation from Greek philosophy or mythology as from Scripture; depth psychology is as easily drawn upon as dogma; the history of culture as readily analyzed as the history of the Church.

264 Tillich, ST I, p.40.

experience so that theology becomes mere repetition instead of transformation, and the excessive influence of experience by which a new production results instead of a transformation.<sup>265</sup>

Now if the theologian has before him a rich variety of sources, all of which will be mediated through his experience, this question arises: What will be the norm to which the sources and experience must be subjected? According to Tillich, there is no one, universally valid norm for systematic theology. 'The norm grows; it is not produced intentionally; its appearance is not the work of theological reflection but of the Spiritual life of the church, for the church is the "home" of systematic theology.'<sup>266</sup>

What does Tillich mean by 'the Spiritual life of the church?'

It appears that he means that the norm evolves out of the Church's encounter with its contemporary culture. He writes:

It is not an exaggeration to say that today man experiences his present situation in terms of disruption, conflict, self-destruction, meaninglessness, and despair in all realms of life. This experience is expressed in the arts and in literature, conceptualized in existential philosophy, actualized in political cleavages of all kinds, and analyzed in the psychology of the unconscious . . . . The question arising out of this experience is not, as in the Reformation, the question of a merciful God and the forgiveness of sins; nor is it, as in the early Greek church, the question of finitude, of death and error; nor is it the question of personal religious life or the Christianization of culture and society. It is the question of a reality in which the self-estrangement of our existence is overcome, a reality of reconciliation and reunion, of creativity, meaning and hope. We shall call such a reality the 'New Being.'<sup>267</sup>

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265 Ibid., p.46.

266 Ibid., p.48.

267 Ibid., p.49.

So the present apologetic situation necessarily calls for the answer 'New Being.' This is the norm, says Tillich, to which the sources and experience are to be subject. The circular nature of Tillich's argument is glaringly evident: the multiplicity of sources are mediated through experience; this calls for a norm for both the sources and experience; the norm is the New Being; the reason we know this is the norm is our experience. The contemporary situation reveals to us the norm, by which we judge the sources, which will give the answers to the question of the contemporary situation!<sup>268</sup> Tillich, of course, would not want to admit that the answers are derived from the questions. 'These answers are contained in the revelatory events on which Christianity is based and are taken by systematic theology from the sources, through the medium, under the norm.'<sup>269</sup> Nevertheless, inasmuch as Tillich already has shown how the norm grows out of the same soil as the questions, it is difficult to see how he can be so certain about which sources supply the proper answers. By starting with a multiplicity of sources, none of which are authoritative in themselves, Tillich is forced to locate the norm in human experience - the

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268 It is no wonder that Karl Barth asked: 'Is man with his philosophical questions, for Tillich, not more than simply the beginning point of the development of this whole method of correlation? Is he not, in that he himself knows which questions to ask, anticipating their correctness, and therefore already in possession of the answers and their consequences?' Karl Barth, 'An Introductory Report By Karl Barth' in THE SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY OF PAUL TILlich - A REVIEW AND ANALYSIS, by Alexander J. McKelway (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964), p.13.

269 Tillich, ST I, p.64.

situation which gives rise to the questions in the first place. His distinction between the content and form of the answer (the former derived from revelation and the latter from experience) is not at all convincing. It is difficult to understand how he can say that 'there is a mutual dependence between question and answer,'<sup>270</sup> when clearly the question governs the answer: it controls not only the way in which the answer is stated (form), but also the content, inasmuch as it sits in judgment over the answers, determining which one is authoritative.

Tillich quite consistently follows through with this accent on experience as he unfolds his doctrine of revelation. The question, to which revelation is the answer, arises from the nature of human reason. Reason is torn apart by conflicts which ask for an answer.<sup>271</sup> 'Reason does not resist revelation. It asks for revelation, for revelation means the reintegration of reason.'<sup>272</sup> Revelation does not destroy reason; rather, it transcends the limits of reason (including the basic condition of finite reason: the subject-object structure). It is, therefore, 'ecstatic reason.' Tillich says simply: 'there is no revelation without ecstasy.'<sup>273</sup> Revelation is received through ecstatic experience. This ecstasy does not just happen, as in a vacuum; it is mediated in different ways. 'There is no reality, thing, or event which cannot become a bearer of the mystery of being

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270 Ibid.

271 Tillich details the precise nature of the conflict as 'autonomy against heteronomy,' 'relativism against absolutism,' and 'formalism against emotionalism' (ibid., pp.83ff.).

272 Ibid., p.94.

273 Ibid., p.112.

and enter into a revelatory correlation.'<sup>274</sup> Thus Tillich lists nature, history, groups, individuals, and the word as all potential media of revelation.<sup>275</sup> Nothing can be excluded, because nothing is included on the basis of special qualities. 'No person and no thing is worthy in itself to represent our ultimate concern.'<sup>276</sup>

Again the question of a criterion raises itself. Which - and whose - ecstatic experience is normative? Christianity claims that the revelation in Jesus as the Christ is final. 'Final' does not mean last, according to Tillich, but genuine. 'It means the decisive, fulfilling, unsurpassable revelation, that which is the criterion of all others.'<sup>277</sup> But what makes this particular revelation final? Tillich's answer:

a revelation is final if it has the power of negating itself without losing itself. This paradox is based on the fact that every revelation is conditioned by the medium in and through which it appears. The question of the final revelation is the question of a medium of revelation which overcomes its own finite conditions by sacrificing them, and itself with them. He who is the bearer of the final revelation must surrender his finitude - not only his life but also his finite power and knowledge and perfection. In doing so, he affirms that he is the bearer of final revelation (the 'Son of God' in classical terms). He becomes completely transparent to the mystery he reveals . . . . In the picture of Jesus as the Christ we have the picture of a man who possesses these qualities, a man who, therefore, can be called the medium of final revelation. 278

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274 Ibid., p.118.

275 Ibid., pp.118-26.

276 Ibid., p.118.

277 Ibid., p.133.

278 Ibid.



Apparently for Tillich, then, revelation is not revelation in the finite, but to the extent that it overcomes the finite. Whereas John's Gospel speaks about the Word who became flesh,<sup>279</sup> Tillich seems to be saying that the flesh must sacrifice itself to the Word. This has enormous significance for the development of his christology, as we shall see, but at this point we must emphasize that Tillich assumes that the ultimate cannot be expressed in the finite. On the contrary, it is revealed most fully where the finite is overcome.

The question to Tillich then is: How does he know this? On what basis has he asserted that the bearer of final revelation 'must' surrender his own finitude? Certainly he cannot appeal to Scripture at this juncture, for by his own formulation, Scripture is only one source among others; so also Church history and the history of dogma. His analysis of the contemporary situation has led him to affirm that the norm for these sources is the New Being, but clearly this idea in itself has not provided him with this fundamental insight about 'final revelation.' So the question keeps returning: How does he know? How is it that he is in such a position to be able to pronounce upon what revelation 'must' be like?

Perched on a high pinnacle, Tillich is somehow in possession of a vast panorama overlooking not only human reality, but divine. He has risen to such heights that he can see the proper relationship between human existence and divine revelation; indeed, as he

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279 John 1:14.

correlates these two realms he is able to announce even the proper nature of revelation. However, if we ask what it is he stands upon which provides such a vast authoritative view, we see that the ground beneath his feet is only as substantial as his own intellect. That is to say, he is in fact standing on nothing outside of himself, but has perched himself on a rationalistic mountain of his own creation. With great speculative power, Tillich has created a synthesis of universal proportions. He numbers among the great system builders 'for whom all things must be made to serve their intellectual construction and for whom even what is negative lives only from the positive which it denies,'<sup>280</sup> Thus Kenneth Hamilton argues that 'Tillich's system still stands firmly in the Hegelian succession.'<sup>281</sup>

Tillich would contend, against this charge, that he has taken into account the existentialist reaction against Hegel. Has he not, after all, systematically probed the human situation? Theology, he told us, is about 'what concerns us ultimately.' This, he believes, points to the existential character of religious experience. Calling upon Kierkegaard, he declares that religion 'is a matter of infinite passion and interest.'<sup>282</sup> He criticizes the hybris ('self-elevation toward the realm of the divine') by which Hegel placed himself on

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280 Zahrnt, THE QUESTION OF GOD, p.302.

281 Kenneth Hamilton, THE SYSTEM AND THE GOSPEL - A CRITIQUE OF PAUL TILlich (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1963), p.46.

282 Tillich, ST I, p.12.

the throne of providence<sup>283</sup> and contended that idealism in general failed to see 'the gap between the unconditioned and the conditioned which no ontological or ethical self-elevation can bridge.'<sup>284</sup> This gap, according to Tillich, can only be transcended 'in the power of the transcendent, i.e., in faith.'<sup>285</sup>

Has Tillich, then, sufficiently separated himself from the 'Hegelian succession' in which Hamilton has placed him? It is true that, in the fabric of his system, he devotes much attention to human existence, drawing especially on the existential analyses of the human condition produced in this century (e.g., Heidegger), but this is true only of the content of his system; methodologically, it is a different matter. What Tillich does, in fact, is take up the terminology of existentialism and incorporate it into his system of universal truth. Tillich is often described as a Christian existentialist, but such a label can hardly be justified. For he has never held that existentialism is sufficient in itself to provide a comprehensive view of life. 'On the contrary, he has consistently maintained that existentialist elements must be brought into relation with their opposite (essentialist elements) within a rounded

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283 Paul Tillich, A HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN THOUGHT FROM ITS JUDAIC AND HELLENISTIC ORIGINS TO EXISTENTIALISM, ed. Carl E. Braaten (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), p.414.

284 Tillich, THE PROTESTANT ERA, p.68.

285 Ibid.

philosophy.'<sup>286</sup> Since this is accomplished in the power of his own thought, the system epistemologically evolves out of an idealistic approach. Indeed, so he admits: 'I am epistemologically an idealist, if idealism means the assertion of the identity of thought and being as the principle of truth.'<sup>287</sup>

If we raise again the question of authority, we can now more fully understand his refusal to grant a normative power to any of the multiple sources available to theology, for in the end, Tillich himself is the authority. If he speaks about the New Being as the theological norm for today, he knows this because of his comprehensive analysis of the human situation, and if he believes the Christ to be the New Being demanded by our times, the 'final revelation,' it is because he has systematically worked out before-

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286 Hamilton, THE SYSTEM AND THE GOSPEL, p.38. See also Adrian Thatcher, THE ONTOLOGY OF PAUL TILLICH, (London: Oxford University Press, 1978), p.24.

287 Tillich, ON THE BOUNDARY, p.82. While Hamilton sees Tillich in the 'Hegelian succession,' David Hopper more specifically identifies Tillich's relationship with idealism by attempting to show his dependence on Schelling. According to Hopper, Tillich's basic ontological frame of reference is found in his 1912 dissertation for the degree Licentiate of Theology, MYSTICISM AND GUILT-CONSCIOUSNESS IN SCHELLING'S PHILOSOPHICAL DEVELOPMENTS. (David Hopper, TILLICH: A THEOLOGICAL PORTRAIT (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1968), p.107.) Tillich seemed to confirm this, at least in part, when he wrote: 'With respect to my ontological thought generally, I want to state that it is much less influenced by existentialism than by Aristotle and Schelling' (a reply quoted in Gustave Weigel, 'The Theological Significance of Paul Tillich' in PAUL TILLICH IN CATHOLIC THOUGHT, ed. Thomas A. O'Meara and Celestin D. Weisser (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 1965), p.23).

hand what revelation 'must' be like. To the question of authority

he has answered in effect, 'My idea of theology shall interpret the Christian faith. And the authority by which it will act shall be the appeal of the idea itself, backed by the coherence of my system which will show the implications of the idea and how it can be used to give an intelligible picture of human life and the universe within which life is lived.' 288

And it is this system which, by a strange irony, asserts that for revelation to be final the finite 'must' be sacrificed to the infinite. Tillich has formulated this principle not on the authority of revelation itself, but by means of a finite projection of thought which enables him rationally to grasp the nature of the finite. Thus there emerges a serious flaw in Tillich's whole theological system: his theological method contradicts his theological content. His system is constructed out of the very materials it later declares unusable. By means of finite reason, he has developed a theology which asserts that the finite 'must' be sacrificed to the infinite. Though he has set 'methodological rationality' as one of the fundamental requirements of systematic

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288 Hamilton, THE SYSTEM AND THE GOSPEL, p.25.

Thus the principle argument of Hamilton's book is that the system itself (Tillich's 'idea') exerts totalitarian influence over its interpretation of the Gospel. Though Hamilton often gives way to harsh polemic, his argument is, it seems to me, well founded.

theology,<sup>289</sup> he has himself apparently violated this principle.

If Tillich has announced from the empyrean heights the ecstatic character of revelation, and further has described revelation as 'final' if it completely sacrifices the finite to the infinite, there is a reason for this that emerges from within the content of his theology. For the view from the mountain which occupies his attention is what one might call a 'supra-transcendental God.' In order to demonstrate this, we must proceed to an analysis of what is central for Tillich's theology : his ontology.

The basic question which concerns theology is the question of God, and for Tillich, 'God is the answer to the question implied in being.'<sup>290</sup> Thus the question of being is no mere ancillary problem for theology to deal with. It is the *raison d'être* for the question about God.

'The ontological question is: what is being?'<sup>291</sup> This question, the question of being-itself, 'arises in something like a "metaphysical shock" - the shock of possible non-being.'<sup>292</sup> Faced with the fact that he is rather than is not, a person asks what the is of his life

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289 Tillich, ST I, p.57.

290 Ibid., p.163.

291 Ibid.

292 Ibid.

means, he asks about the nature of being.<sup>293</sup> Because theology must be apologetic, i.e., answering theology, this question, the most fundamental to human existence, will provide the form in which the answer is cast. If 'God is the answer to the question implied in being,' as Tillich asserts, then it is obvious that the way in which being is analyzed is not a minor matter for Tillich's theology. It is determinative for all that follows.

Tillich identifies 'the basic ontological structure' as that which is the implicit condition for the ontological question; that is, since a question presupposes an asking subject and an object about which a question is asked, the subject-object structure of being is presupposed. This in turn 'presupposes the self-world structure as the basic articulation of being.'<sup>294</sup>

At a second level of analysis, this basic structure can be broken down into three polarities, the first of each corresponding to the self-relatedness of being, and the second to the 'world' part of the structure of being.<sup>295</sup> These polarities are: individualization and participation,<sup>296</sup> dynamics and form,<sup>297</sup> and

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293 The question may be asked, Given his concern for ontology, how does Tillich view the relationship between theology and philosophy? Tillich's answer: 'Philosophy and theology ask the question of being. But they ask it from different perspectives. Philosophy deals with the structure of being itself; theology deals with the meaning of being for us' (ST I, p.22).

294 Ibid., p.164.

295 Ibid., p.165.

296 Ibid., pp.174ff.

297 Ibid., pp.178ff.

freedom and destiny.<sup>298</sup> A thorough consideration of these 'ontological elements' is beyond the scope of this chapter, but what is important to note is that Tillich believes these polarities form the structure of being. Being comprises both individual centredness (individualization) and relatedness to the world (participation); both the potentiality and power of being (dynamics), and the structure for creative vitality (form); and both personal independence (freedom) and the situation in which the individual finds himself (destiny).<sup>299</sup>

But being in itself does not give rise to the question about God. What causes this is the possibility of nonbeing, the 'metaphysical shock.' Therefore, humanity is faced with the problem of finitude.<sup>300</sup> 'Being, limited by nonbeing is finitude.'<sup>301</sup> Because human beings have the power of self-transcendence, they become aware of their finitude, and are thus thrust into anxiety.<sup>302</sup> The question of God thus becomes inevitable.

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298 Ibid., pp.182ff.

299 In addition to the 'ontological elements,' Tillich introduces a further 'level' of being, the categories: 'Categories are the forms in which the mind grasps and shapes reality' (p.192). The four categories are time, space, causality, and substance. The spatial limitations of this chapter disallow any discussion of these, but they do reveal the breadth of Tillich's ontology, by which he seeks to describe all 'levels' of being.

300 Ibid., pp.186ff.

301 Ibid., p.189.

302 Ibid., p.191.



The question of God must be asked because the threat of nonbeing, which man experiences as anxiety, drives him to the question of being conquering nonbeing and of courage conquering anxiety. 303

The answer to this question arising out of the anxiety of human finitude is God. God is not a being; 'the being of God is being-itself.'<sup>304</sup> If God were a being he would be subject to the structure of being and the categories of finitude. But God cannot be subject to anything, for he radically transcends everything. He is holy. His holiness 'makes it impossible to draw him into the context of the ego-world and the subject-object correlation. He himself is the ground and meaning of this correlation, not an element within it.'<sup>305</sup> Thus Tillich defines God as 'the ground of being'<sup>306</sup> - perhaps the most well-known phrase in his theology. God is not subject to the structure of being; the structure is grounded in him. He is the structure of being.<sup>307</sup>

Tillich, therefore, vigorously champions the transcendence of God. In fact, it could be argued that he is a supra-transcendentalist, for he defines God as that which is beyond the transcendent personal

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303 Ibid., p.208.

304 Ibid., p.235.

305 Ibid., p.272.

306 Ibid., p.238.

307 Ibid. David Hopper argues that in this Tillich has been influenced by Schelling: 'God, Schelling finally asserted, is all-embracing reality; God himself is the final synthesis . . . . God transcends the cleavage of subject and object.' Hopper, TILlich: A THEOLOGICAL PORTRAIT, pp.119-20.

God of traditional theology. He is no theist in the ordinary sense of the word, for he rejects the idea of an 'existent,' personal God. To affirm this about God, according to Tillich, would mean that God is necessarily a being alongside of other beings, and therefore subject to the ontological structure and its elements. But God is transcendent. He is thus being-itself, the ground of all being.<sup>308</sup> So Tillich introduces the phrase 'the God above God' as a way of transcending theism.<sup>309</sup> The 'God above God' is the power of being which infinitely transcends every being and the totality of beings.

Does this mean then that God is non-personal? Not exactly. Tillich recognizes that 'according to every word of the Bible, God reveals himself as personal.'<sup>310</sup> But God cannot be personal in the way 'personal' is normally understood. For if he was, he would be found within the whole of reality, and then 'the whole of reality' would be the transcendent concept.<sup>311</sup> Nevertheless, God is not less than personal. 'Being includes personal being; it does not deny it. The ground of being is the ground of personal being, not its negation.'<sup>312</sup> God includes the personal, but also transcends it. This means, therefore, that 'our encounter with the God who is a person includes the encounter with the God who is the ground of everything personal and as such not a person.'<sup>313</sup>

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308 Paul Tillich, THE COURAGE TO BE (London: Collins, 1952; reprinted, Fount Paperbacks, 1977) pp.178-79.

309 Ibid.

310 Paul Tillich, BIBLICAL RELIGION AND THE SEARCH FOR ULTIMATE REALITY (London: James Nisbet, 1955), p.22.

311 Ibid., p.82.

312 Ibid., p.83.

313 Ibid.

This emphasis on divine transcendence is what led Zahrnt to write: 'One might say that Tillich's whole theology is concentrated upon the first and second commandments. It contends for the deity of God against the misuse of his name.'<sup>314</sup> To protect the holy from profanation, Tillich wages an iconoclastic battle against all cognitive idols which limit the transcendent otherness of God in any way.

To this end, Tillich introduces, as an important part of his system, the use of symbols as a way of 'protecting the mystery of God and preserving it from becoming something finite, directly present, and within the world.'<sup>315</sup> There is only one nonsymbolic statement, according to Tillich: the statement that God is being-itself. After this has been said, 'nothing else can be said about God as God which is not symbolic.'<sup>316</sup> A symbol is not merely a sign, the latter bearing no necessary relation to that to which it points, but 'participates in the reality of that for which it stands.'<sup>317</sup> Because 'everything participates in being-itself,' finite reality can provide a symbolic basis for assertions about God.<sup>318</sup>

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314 Zahrnt, THE QUESTION OF GOD, p.301.

315 Ibid., p.318.

316 Tillich, ST I, p.239.

317 Ibid.

318 Ibid., p.240. Tillich thus affirms the analogia entis, but denies it is the property of a questionable natural theology which seeks to move from the finite to the infinite. It does, however, give us 'our only justification of speaking at all about God. It is based on the fact that God must be understood as being itself' (ibid.).

Nevertheless, though there is an identity, the symbol is not the thing itself. The concept of symbol protects the radical transcendence of God; it preserves the absolute break between the infinite and the finite.

As George McLean stated it, 'whatever might be said about his projection of the divine beyond subject and object, it has provided a defence of God's transcendence.'<sup>319</sup> The question we must ask of Tillich's theology, however, is whether Tillich has in fact systematically described the transcendence of the God who has revealed himself (including his holy otherness) in Jesus Christ and the kerygma which witnesses to him. Does it not appear as if Tillich, by relying so thoroughly on the power of his own reason, has really arrived at an abstract transcendence to which he has given the name 'God'? The irony, of course, is that Tillich is able to describe the transcendence of God only by a massive act of intellectual self-transcendence. Epistemologically, Tillich has had to place himself in the absurd position of being a bit higher than the absolutely highest, in order to see it all so clearly. The result is an abstraction that, for all its lofty recognition

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319 George F. McLean, 'Paul Tillich's Existential Philosophy of Protestantism,' in PAUL TILlich IN CATHOLIC THOUGHT, ed. Thomas A. O'Meara and Celestin D. Weissner (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 1965), p.70. Tillich's emphasis on transcendence has been noted by other interpreters as well. See Anderson, HISTORICAL TRANSCENDENCE AND THE REALITY OF GOD, p.29; Nels F. Ferré, 'Tillich's View of the Church,' in THE THEOLOGY OF PAUL TILlich, ed. Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Brettal (New York: Macmillan, 1952), p.251; and Thatcher, THE ONTOLOGY OF PAUL TILlich, pp.86-88.

of divine holiness, profanes the deity of God by subjecting it to its own 'transcendentalism.' More will be written about this later in the thesis; now we must see what difficulty this abstract transcendentalism leads to.

As Tillich's transcendentalism unfolds, a curious fact emerges: it results in a thorough-going immanentism! By pushing God into the heights he has firmly set him in the depths. When God is conceived of as being itself, the reverse notion is not slow in suggesting itself. Is not all being God? Or - more moderately stated - does not all being somehow participate in the being of God? By a way of a radical transcendence, Tillich was led to this radical immanence. The result of the former can be atheism; the result of the latter, pantheism. 'Not surprisingly, Tillich has been accused of both.'<sup>320</sup> Strictly speaking, however, Tillich is neither an atheist nor a pantheist. He does not deny the reality of God, only the God of theism who is a being alongside of others. And he does not make a strict one-to-one correlation between the universe and God, but since his theology identifies God as the ground of all being, 'it must be classified as a monistic system standing in very close relation to pantheism.'<sup>321</sup> This transcendentalism of an immanent character is revealed clearly in this passage of Tillich's:

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320 Thatcher, THE ONTOLOGY OF PAUL TILlich, p.88.

321 Hamilton, THE SYSTEM AND THE GOSPEL, p.85.

Being-itself infinitely transcends every finite being. There is no proportion or gradation between the finite and the infinite. There is an absolute break, an infinite 'jump.' On the other hand, everything finite participates in being-itself and in its mystery. Otherwise it would not have the power of being. 322

Tillich's 'on the other hand' points to the second major contradiction in his theology - this time in the context itself: Tillich seeks to conjoin, in one ontology, both a radical transcendence and a radical immanence. Adrian Thatcher has stated the problem well:

How can the finite be essentially included within being-itself, how can being-itself posit its opposite non-being within itself in a dialectical process, if being-itself is at the same time ineffable and beyond characterization? How can that which is utterly beyond any life-process also be the supporting ground and moving power of them all? Two different concepts of God and of being seem to be required if both God's transcendence and immanence are to be forced so far apart in some contexts and held so close together in others. 323

Tillich, of course, did not intend to create 'two different concepts of God'; nevertheless, the contradiction created by his abstract transcendentalism seems to require it. In reducing the definition of God to 'being-itself,' which was an attempt to keep God unlimited, Tillich walked into the house of immanentalism

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322 Tillich, ST I, p.277.

323 Thatcher, THE ONTOLOGY OF PAUL TILlich, pp.86-87.  
 Cf. Hamilton, THE SYSTEM AND THE GOSPEL, pp.89ff.  
 Hamilton believes that Tillich 'separates the divine and the human at one level of being, but that level is no more than a preliminary one' (p.91). Tillich's real intent, he contends, is to develop a monistic immanentalism. Hamilton's theory, however, grants a consistency to Tillich's thought that ignores the very real contradiction created by an abstract transcendentalism described in an immanentalistic way.

through the back door, so to speak. Ironically, we are back to where Bonhoeffer left us, only this time not via an incarnationism, but by way of a transcendentalism uneasy with the notion of incarnation.<sup>324</sup>

Now if God is being-itself, the ground of all being, one would reasonably expect all being to participate in the perfections of God. The human experience, of course, provides overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Our existential experience is one of suffering and shame. How can our being be God's being? To refer again to the Karamazov brothers, is not life as we experience it, more often represented by the passionate, broken life of Dmitri than by the mystical purity of Alyosha?

In Tillich's system this fact is dealt with through the distinction made between essence and existence. For Tillich, the traditional doctrine of 'the fall' is best understood as the transition from essence to existence.<sup>325</sup> Because the divine life is creative, constantly 'actualizing itself in inexhaustible abundance,' the doctrine of creation is not simply the story of an event which took place 'once upon a time.' 'It is the basic description of the relation between God and the world.'<sup>326</sup> All being is grounded in God who has created, is creating, and will creatively fulfil his telos.<sup>327</sup> As God grants being to the creature,

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324 Tillich, ST II, pp.94-95, 148-49.

325 Ibid., p.31.

326 Tillich, ST I, p.252.

327 Ibid., p.253.

he also grants freedom and destiny (one of the 'ontological elements'), and it is this creaturely, finite freedom which makes inevitable the transition from essence to existence. To actualize its freedom, the creature must step out on its own, but that means to step away from the ground of its being. The creature thus is caught between the anxiety of losing itself by not actualizing its potentialities, and the anxiety of losing itself if it does and is separated from being-itself.<sup>328</sup> The creature decides for the latter; its 'finite freedom works within the framework of universal destiny'<sup>329</sup> and the transition from essence to existence becomes fact. Tillich writes:

Man has left the ground in order to 'stand upon' himself, to actualize what he essentially is, in order to be finite freedom. This is the point at which the doctrine of creation and the doctrine of the fall join . . . . Fully developed creatureliness is fallen creatureliness. The creature has actualized its freedom in so far as it is outside the creative ground of the divine life . . . . To be outside the divine life means to stand in actualized freedom, in an existence which is no longer united with essence. Seen from one side, this is the end of creation. Seen from the other side, it is the beginning of the fall. 330

For Tillich, then, the creation equals the fall. Humanity is granted being from the ground of being; a constituent element of being is freedom; as it actualizes what it is, it 'falls' from essence to existence. The result is 'the state of estrangement.'<sup>331</sup>

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328 Tillich, ST II, p.36.

329 Ibid., p.32.

330 Tillich, ST I, p.255.

331 Tillich, ST II, p.44.



'Man as he exists is not what he essentially is and ought to be. He is estranged from his true being.'<sup>332</sup> The marks of estrangement are unbelief (turning away from God toward self), hybris (seeking to elevate self into the sphere of the divine), and concupiscence (drawing all reality into self).<sup>333</sup> Tillich prefers the word 'estrangement' to describe the predicament of human existence, but nevertheless wants to retain the word 'sin' in theological vocabulary because it expresses the personal character of estrangement. The actualizing of finite freedom is a personal act, arising from the freedom of the creature. Freedom, though, always stands in polar relationship to destiny; thus the free act of actualizing freedom is carried out in relationship to the universal state of humankind, i.e., estrangement. This is the meaning behind the phrase 'original sin.'<sup>334</sup> 'In every free act the destiny of estrangement is involved and, vice versa, . . . the destiny of estrangement is actualized by all free acts.'<sup>335</sup>

Tillich recognizes that his doctrine of creation and the fall seems to make sin an ontological necessity,<sup>336</sup> but surprisingly

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332 Ibid., p.45.

333 Ibid., pp.51-52.

334 Ibid., p.46.

335 Ibid., p.56.

336 Ibid., p.43. Tillich is responding here to an early criticism of his theology made by Reinhold Niebuhr. Niebuhr raised the question whether Tillich ontologizes away the reality of the fall and sin. See Reinhold Niebuhr, 'Biblical Thought And Ontological Speculation in Tillich's Theology' in THE THEOLOGY OF PAUL TILLICH, ed. Charles W. Kegley & Robert W. Bretall (New York: Macmillan, 1952), pp.216-27.

does not really try to get himself out of this difficulty. He argues, in effect, that there is no other alternative because 'actualized creation and estranged existence are identical.'<sup>337</sup> If one denies the literalist interpretation of the Genesis story, which Tillich certainly does, then one must also necessarily deny a historical stage of created goodness. Theologians must therefore accept the consequences: creation and the fall are one. To be an actualized creature means necessarily to be in the state of estrangement.

Thus Tillich places his picture of human existence in the setting of a sharp dualism between the divine, which is the state of essential wholeness in perfection, and the human, the state of actualized existence, which is neither whole nor perfect - in fact, evil.<sup>338</sup> To support this view, Tillich appeals to Plato, and maintains that 'on this point, the Platonic and the Christian evaluations of existence coincide.'<sup>339</sup> For Tillich, 'human existence can only be understood if Plato was right and terrestrial life is to be imagined as a shadow of the really real and the truly divine.'<sup>340</sup>

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337 Tillich, ST II, p.44.

338 Tillich uses the term 'evil' to describe the consequences of the state of sin and estrangement. See ST II, pp.59-78.

339 Ibid., p.23.

340 Hamilton, THE SYSTEM AND THE GOSPEL, p.79. This is another reason why Tillich does not like to speak about the existence of God. 'God does not exist. He is being-itself beyond essence and existence. Therefore to argue that God exists is to deny him' (ST I, p.205).

But can the Tillichian view be supported by Scripture as well as by Plato? Is it really true that one must accept the coincidence of creation and the fall as a necessary consequence of rejecting the literalist interpretation of the Genesis story? Tillich overlooks the possibility that the literal reading of the account in Genesis may be rejected while the central intent of the story is affirmed. That is, one does not necessarily have to accept a historical stage of innocence in order to affirm the difference between the act of creation and the act of sin. What the story witnesses to is the essential goodness of creation itself, as a gift from God, and the absurd disobedience of the creature by which he turns his back on the Creator. Tillich's view completely excludes any idea of disobedience - an aspect of sin prominent not simply in the third chapter of Genesis but throughout the entire Bible. Sin, for Tillich, is the necessary consequence of being a creature; the absurd mystery of human disobedience is rationalized away by means of a Platonic ontology. As Tillich would have it, the sinful act is accepting the gift of creation; to take what God freely gives is at the same time the act of turning away from God. This makes finite freedom completely ambiguous in Tillich's system. 'From one point of view it is man's end, the telos of creation, but from the other point of view this is man's shame.'<sup>341</sup> Tillich leaves

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341 J. Heywood Thomas, PAUL TILLICH - AN APPRAISAL (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1963), p.132.

no place for an actualized freedom for God; the free act, by definition, is the sinful act. That this differs from the Genesis story is not the critical point. What is at issue is a whole stream of biblical tradition which views sin as an absurd act of wilful disobedience and not as an automatic fact of creation. For Tillich, the prophetic and apostolic threats of condemnation and judgment, and the urgent call for repentance and return, can only be nonsense.<sup>342</sup>

By defining the transcendence of God in a way that leads inevitably to its opposite, Tillich has wedded together in one ontology a radical transcendentalism and a radical immanentalism. The result is a further contradiction: Tillich asserts that humanity is both separated from God and not separated from God. The first is consistent with his transcendentalism; the second with his immanentalism; but each is inconsistent with the other. Humanity, Tillich tells us, is 'estranged' from God through the actualizing of its finite freedom. With Platonic dualism as his intellectual ally, Tillich describes this as 'the transition from essence to existence.' The result is estrangement, sin, evil. God, however,

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342 George Tavad correctly points out that Tillich is wrong to constrict his account of the fall to the Genesis story of Adam and Eve, since the Christian view is founded more on The Epistle To The Romans (especially 5:18). 'By overlooking the Pauline doctrine, Tillich can treat the entire doctrine of the Fall as mythical. This helps him to ontologize original sin. It has been done at the cost of a clearly scriptural teaching, and by rejecting a whole stream of tradition. . . ' (George H. Tavad, PAUL TILLICH AND THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE (London: Burns and Oates, 1962), p.42).

infinitely transcends this. His being is perfect wholeness. Thus humanity is separated in some way from the ground of being. Nevertheless, humanity cannot really be separated, for it still possesses being, albeit in estranged existence. To say that a person is means that he participates in being-itself, and being-itself is God. Tillich himself seems to recognize the difficulty when he writes that

man discovers himself when he discovers God; he discovers something that is identical with himself although it transcends him infinitely, something from which he is estranged, but from which he never has been and never can be separated. 343

How, we must ask, can one discover God as both 'identical with himself' and that which 'transcends him infinitely.' Simply to affirm both of these in an authoritative way does not resolve the difficulty; it merely underscores the presence of a problem that runs throughout Tillich's system.

This dilemma constitutes an intractable problem for the ontology because the system seems to require both (a) that God cannot participate in estrangement because estrangement is by definition separation from God, and (b) that God must participate in estrangement since even what is estranged has being, and God is the ground of all being, whether it is

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343 Paul Tillich, THEOLOGY OF CULTURE, ed. Robert C. Kimbal (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p.10.

reconciled to him or not. And both answers are present side by side in the ontology. 344

Unfortunately, this contradiction never finds resolution in Tillich's theology. On the contrary, it creates a basic ambiguity throughout.

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344 Thatcher, THE ONTOLOGY OF PAUL TILlich, p.137.

See also Alistair Macleod, PAUL TILlich - AN ESSAY ON THE ROLE OF ONTOLOGY IN HIS PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1973). This highly critical work argues that there is 'an incoherence at the very heart of Tillich's philosophical thought' because he fails 'to distinguish several quite different concepts of ontology' (p.18).

## B. The Manifestation Of What Is

To show how christology fits into Tillich's system of theology, we should begin by describing in more detail the nature of estranged existence.

'Man's estrangement from his essential being is the universal character of existence.'<sup>345</sup> This estrangement results in the disruption of being, the disruption of life, and the disruption of history.

The structure of being, with the basic distinction between self and world, and its 'ontological polarities,' is not fundamentally altered in the condition of existence, but the estrangement of existence manifests itself as the relation of the poles is disrupted. The first mark of evil is self-loss, the loss of one's determining centre through disruptive drives which cannot be brought into unity. As the drives move against each other, the person is split, and with the loss of self, one also loses his world.<sup>346</sup> 'The interdependence of self-loss and world-loss in the state of estrangement is manifest in the interdependent loss of the polar elements of being.'<sup>347</sup> In the moment of separation from essence, freedom becomes arbitrariness and destiny mechanical necessity;<sup>348</sup>

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345 Tillich, ST II, p.74.

346 Ibid., p.61.

347 Ibid., p.62.

348 Ibid., pp.62-63.

dynamics are distorted into a formless urge for self-transcendence and form becomes eternal law<sup>349</sup>; and individualization becomes loneliness and participation descends to submergence in the collective.<sup>350</sup> These conflicts have many consequences, the two outstanding examples being suffering marked by meaninglessness and loneliness.<sup>351</sup> Finally, over all is cast the ominous shadow of death, for 'estranged from the ultimate power of being, man is determined by his finitude.'<sup>352</sup>

With the disruption of the ontological polarities comes the disruption of life. The ontological polarities form the structure of being; God is being-itself. Another word Tillich uses to describe the unity of the ontological elements is 'spirit'; God is spirit. Now 'spirit' is the telos of life. 'Actualized as life, being-itself is fulfilled as spirit.'<sup>353</sup> Thus Tillich sets out an equation like this: God = being = spirit = life. Corresponding to the three ontological polarities, life is characterized by Tillich as having three functions: 1. self-integration (relating to the individualization - participation polarity),<sup>354</sup> 2. self-creation (relating to the dynamics - form polarity),<sup>355</sup> and 3. self-transcendence (relating to the freedom - destiny polarity).<sup>356</sup>

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349 Ibid., p.64.

350 Ibid., pp.65-66.

351 Ibid., pp.70-71.

352 Ibid., p.66.

353 Tillich, ST I, p.249.

354 Tillich, ST III, pp.32-50.

355 Ibid., pp.50-86.

356 Ibid., pp.86-106.



The first function describes the centredness of life; the second describes growth as an aspect of life; the third describes the sublimity of life as spirit. Additionally, these three functions are named by Tillich morality, culture, and religion.

It is not necessary for us to explain at length Tillich's detailed analyses of these functions of the spirit. What is important to note is that Tillich is describing being, in this part of his system, from the functional viewpoint. As being is actualized in life, it is marked by the acts of morality, culture, and religion. And further, inasmuch as actualized life is experienced only in estrangement, these functions are always ambiguous in nature.

When considered from the standpoint of the historical dimension, the three functions of life reveal additional aspects of their ambiguity. Historical self-integration is marked by the problems of empire and centralization.<sup>357</sup> Historical self-creativity shows itself in the tension between revolution and reaction.<sup>358</sup> Historical self-transcendence raises the question of utopia, its possibility and failures.<sup>359</sup> At no point is there a clear 'yes' to be spoken, nor an unambiguous 'no.' Everything is ambiguous, for life is being-in-existence. Since existence is the state of being estranged from essence, life is estrangement. It is always experienced in brokenness and conflict. Thus arises the question of the unambiguous life.

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357 Ibid., pp.339-442.

358 Ibid., pp.343-44.

359 Ibid., pp.344-46.

If this is the question arising from the human predicament, what is the answer offered by 'apologetic theology'? The answer, Tillich tells us, is the 'New Being.'

The term 'New Being,' as used here, points directly to the cleavage between essential and existential being - and is the restorative principle of the whole of this theological system. The New Being is new in so far as it is the undistorted manifestation of essential being within and under the conditions of existence. It is new in contrast to the merely potential character of essential being: and it is new over against the estranged character of existential being. It is actual, conquering the estrangement of actual existence. 360

The Christian assertion is that in Jesus of Nazareth the New Being has appeared. This is a paradoxical statement - paradoxical because essential being has manifest itself under the conditions of existence.<sup>361</sup> 'In one personal life essential Manhood has appeared under the conditions of existence without being conquered by them.'<sup>362</sup> Christ, therefore, is the mediator in that he shows us what humanity essentially is; and because essential humanity is harmoniously united with the ground of being, essential humanity, by its very nature, represents God.<sup>363</sup> 'The paradoxical character of his being consists in the fact that although he has only finite freedom under the conditions of time and space, he is not estranged from the ground of his being.'<sup>364</sup>

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360 Tillich, ST II, p.119.

361 Ibid., p.92.

362 Ibid., p.94.

363 Ibid.

364 Ibid., p.126.

The biblical portrait of Jesus of Nazareth is remarkable in its honest stress on his finitude: Jesus confronts real temptation, experiences anxiety, lacks a definite place, knows insecurity, want, loneliness, and is subject 'to uncertainty in judgment, risks of error, the limits of power, and the vicissitudes of life.'<sup>365</sup> Thus we have the picture of one who experiences all the consequences of existential estrangement, but in whom estrangement is conquered and a permanent unity with God is maintained. 'Into this unity he accepts the negativities of existence without removing them. This is done by transcending them in the power of the unity. This is the New Being as it appears in the biblical picture of Jesus as the Christ.'<sup>366</sup>

In order to gain a clear outline of Tillich's christology, we would do well to raise two questions: 1. How does Tillich relate the divine and human presence in the person of Jesus? and 2. What is the resulting conception of salvation?

It has already been shown that for Tillich revelation is 'final' when the finite is fully sacrificed to the infinite. (Presumably, this assumption is a direct consequence of his transcendentalism.) Jesus shows himself to be the ultimate criterion of revelation because he has fully sacrificed the medium of revelation to the revelation itself; that is, 'Jesus of Nazareth is sacrificed to Jesus as the Christ.'<sup>367</sup> The implication for us is that 'we are

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365 Ibid., p.131.

366 Ibid., p.135.

367 Tillich, ST I, p.135.

liberated from the authority of everything finite in him.'<sup>368</sup>

'It is the end of Jesusology.'<sup>369</sup>

This christological approach finds its parallel in Tillich's description of the New Being as the one who, under the conditions of existence (Jesus of Nazareth) reveals the essence of God-Manhood (the Christ). Jesus of Nazareth is significant because in him the New Being is manifest. In himself, the person of Jesus is not important; yet he commands faith's attention because the Christ is revealed through him. The symbol of the cross points to the fact that Jesus of Nazareth subjected himself fully to the conditions of existence. That he did this without estrangement from the ground of being is the significance of the symbol of the resurrection; through him the cleavage between essence and existence was overcome.<sup>370</sup> He thus reveals the New Being.

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368 Ibid., p.134.

369 Ibid., p.136.

370 Tillich, ST II, pp.152-53. Though Tillich dismisses the psychological explanation of the resurrection (ibid., p.156), his own view comes suspiciously close to this. He writes: 'A real experience made it possible for the disciples to apply the known symbol of resurrection to Jesus, thus acknowledging him definitely as the Christ' (ibid., p.154). Apparently, Tillich believes that by saying the disciples had 'a real experience' he has separated himself from the psychological theory of resurrection. Yet for him, the resurrection 'symbol' still arises from within the disciples themselves. Further, Tillich's a-historical approach to the resurrection is revealed when he states: 'It is the certainty of one's own victory over the death of existential estrangement which creates the certainty of the Resurrection of the Christ as event and symbol; but it is not historical conviction or the acceptance of biblical authority which creates this certainty (ibid., p.155).

How then does this description of Jesus as the Christ fare when set alongside the traditional christological norms of the Church?<sup>371</sup>

Tillich believes that though the councils of Nicea and Chalcedon were forced to use 'very inadequate conceptual tools,' they were nevertheless important events for the Church because through them, 'both the Christ-character and the Jesus-character of the event of Jesus as the Christ were preserved.'<sup>372</sup> Does this mean that Tillich affirms the traditional doctrine of the unio hypostatica of the human and divine natures in Christ? Not really. Because God, by Tillich's definition, is beyond essence and existence, the term 'divine nature' cannot be applied to Christ in any meaningful way, 'for the Christ (who is Jesus of Nazareth) is not beyond essence and existence.'<sup>373</sup> On the other hand, the term 'human nature' is

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371 Thatcher has catalogued the criticisms against Tillich's christology: 'Some critics believe him to be orthodox in Christology, others that he is Nestorian, Sabellian and Monarchianistic, Adoptionistic, Docetic, Dionysian, and Gnostic!' He concludes from this, probably with justification, that the variety of judgments against him is more significant than any one in particular, because it demonstrates the difficulty of judging a largely ontological vocabulary according to traditional theological norms (Thatcher, THE ONTOLOGY OF PAUL TILlich, pp.147-48).

372 Tillich, ST II, p.145.

373 Ibid., p.148. Similarly, Tillich rejects as 'nonsensical' the statement 'God has become man,' since the word 'God' points to ultimate reality. 'The only thing God cannot do is to cease to be God. But that is just what the assertion "God has become man" means' (ibid., p.94).

ambiguous, and therefore it too should be rejected. Furthermore, historical criticism has demonstrated the impossibility of finding the empirical truth about Jesus of Nazareth,<sup>374</sup> and thus all statements about his human nature are untrustworthy. Tillich, therefore, ends up in a very strange position.

The divinity of Christ has been rejected for fear of a Christological metamorphosis. And the humanity of Christ has been declared unknowable. Thus both the Christ-character and the Jesus-character of Jesus the Christ have been lost. Where the Council of Chalcedon, spearheading the Church, follows a ridge between the chasms, the Christology of Paul Tillich falls into both chasms one after the other. 375

Though it is tempting to linger over the implications of this theology for the doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ, we must press on to raise the question concerning the work of Jesus Christ: What are the soteriological implications of Tillich's christology?

Jesus as the Christ reveals the New Being because in him one life has been lived under the conditions of existence without being conquered by them. As he subjected himself to the conditions of existence (estrangement) he maintained the essential unity between God and humanity. He thus overcame 'in principle' the cleavage between essence and existence. Zahrnt explains the overcoming in this way:

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374 Ibid., pp.101ff.

375 Tavard, PAUL TILlich AND THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE, p.132.

a process of healing has begun which is taking effect as a redeeming power in all existence. The disastrous rift which runs through being and separates one life from another, one man from another, has been healed, and unity restored. And it is this old being healed which is the New Being. 376

For us, then, this means that to experience the New Being in Jesus the Christ means that we experience the power in him which has conquered existential estrangement,<sup>377</sup> Faith is based on the experience of being grasped by this power.<sup>378</sup> This means that Jesus the Christ 'is the keystone in the arch of spiritual manifestations in history. He is not an isolated event.'<sup>379</sup> What makes him unique is that his spirit was 'possessed' by the divine Spirit in a complete way.<sup>380</sup> This makes him the 'qualitative center in a process' which precedes him and extends beyond him, for the divine spirit which made Jesus into the Christ is creatively present in the whole of history.<sup>381</sup>

However, we must ask about the nature of the healing present in the power of the New Being. Is existence really healed? Or is it, rather, destroyed? Alan Lewis has pointed out that

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376 Zahrnt, THE QUESTION OF GOD, p.325.

377 Tillich, ST II, p.125,

378 Ibid., p.155.

379 Tillich, ST III, p.147.

380 Ibid., p.144.

381 Ibid., p.147.

Tillich moves, without always signaling the momentousness of the transition, from the Christ who is not conquered by existence, to the Christ who actually conquers existence. It is one thing to accept the hostile world; it is another for him to elevate the finite out of and beyond the hostile world. 382

This assessment correctly points to the fact that, for Tillich, salvation is not salvation in existence, but salvation from existence. The New Being is manifest in Jesus Christ, Tillich tells us, because Jesus was sacrificed to the Christ, the finite to the infinite. Essence is revealed as existence negates itself. As Thatcher puts it, 'the divinity causes him to destroy his humanity.'<sup>383</sup> This is perhaps the logical consequence of a Platonic dualism which separates essence and existence, especially as existence is identified as necessarily evil, but does this not run counter to a whole stream of tradition, beginning in the Gospels<sup>384</sup> and extending up to the present day,<sup>385</sup> which views the soteriological work of Christ as grounded in an incarnation by which the divine enters fully into human existence, not to destroy it, but to redeem it from the brokenness of sin? It was inevitable that Tillich would want to deny this sort of incarnationalism, for he has equated

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382 Alan E. Lewis, 'The Experience of Grace - The Problem of Sanctification in Contemporary Systematic Theology' (Th.D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1977), p.231. See also Thatcher, THE ONTOLOGY OF PAUL TILlich, p.150, where the same idea is stated in even stronger terms: 'The appearance of the essential Jesus then . . . , does not "save" existence; it crushes it.'

383 Ibid.

384 See, for example, John 1:14: 'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.'

385 See Chapter I of this thesis.



creation itself with the evil of estrangement. Salvation can only mean salvation from human existence when one begins with this assumption.

Yet, as was indicated earlier in this chapter, while Tillich develops a transcendentalism that is very dependent upon Platonic dualism as its conceptual ally, he defines the transcendence of God in a way that leads inevitably to an immanent monism. This inner conflict runs throughout his thought, as is clearly seen in his christology. For if his description of Jesus the Christ seems formed by the radical distinction between essence and existence (following his transcendentalism), his analysis of the salvation that follows Christ's work is more congenial to his immanentism. The New Being brings salvation, i.e., healing. He conquers the evil of estrangement and overcomes the ambiguities of life and history. However, since we can never really be separated from the ground of our being, Christ's work is more a manifestation of what really is, rather than the creation of anything new.

Tillich does describe healing as the 'uniting of that which is estranged . . . . overcoming the split between God and man, man and his world, man and himself.'<sup>386</sup> The threefold character of this salvation is described as participation in the New Being (regeneration),<sup>387</sup>

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386 Tillich, ST II, p.166.

387 Ibid., pp.176-77.

acceptance of the New Being (justification),<sup>388</sup> and transformation by the New Being (sanctification).<sup>389</sup> 'Regeneration is the state of having been drawn into the new reality manifest in Jesus as the Christ,'<sup>390</sup> the state of being grasped by the divine presence. Faith results, not as a human 'work,' but as a consequence of the Spirit's action in a person's life.<sup>391</sup> Such a one is thus justified by God. Justification 'is the eternal act of God by which he accepts as not estranged those who are indeed estranged from him by guilt.'<sup>392</sup> God accepts us, and we, for our part, 'must accept acceptance.'<sup>393</sup> Regeneration and justification are two sides of the one divine act by which God causes the reunion of what is estranged. Sanctification is the process initiated by the event of reunion. It 'is the process by which the New Being transforms personality and community, inside and outside the church.'<sup>394</sup>

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388 Ibid., pp.177-79.

389 Ibid., pp.179-80.

390 Ibid., p.177.

391 Ibid., p.178.

392 Ibid.

393 Ibid., p.179. For a vivid description of grace as acceptance, see Tillich's sermon 'You Are Accepted' in Paul Tillich, THE SHAKING OF THE FOUNDATIONS (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1949), pp.161-62.

394 Tillich, ST II, p.180.

This same event of salvation is described in a slightly different way by Tillich as he views it from the perspective of the ambiguities of life and history. Here he refers to the power of the New Being as the 'Spiritual Presence.' 'When it grasps man, it creates unambiguous life.'<sup>395</sup> The ambiguities of morality, culture, and religion are transcended in the power of the Spiritual Presence.<sup>396</sup> This 'Presence' is mediated to persons through the 'Word and sacraments' defined by traditional theology,<sup>397</sup> but is not narrowly restricted to these media, for 'no part of encountered reality is excluded beforehand from the possibility that it might become sacramental material.'<sup>398</sup>

From the viewpoint of history, the symbols of salvation are 'the Kingdom of God' and 'Eternal Life.' The kingdom of God points to the power of the New Being in overcoming the ambiguities of historical existence,<sup>399</sup> and Eternal Life symbolizes the telos of history.<sup>400</sup> What is the inner aim of history? It is 'life in God.' The word 'in' summarizes the rhythm of Tillich's whole ontological

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395 Tillich, ST III, p.112.

396 Tillich explains the effect of the Spiritual Presence on the ambiguities of religion (ibid., pp.162-245), the ambiguities of culture (pp.245-65), the ambiguities of morality (pp.266-75), and the ambiguities of life in general (pp.275-82).

397 Ibid., p.120.

398 Ibid., p.123.

399 Ibid., pp.385-93.

400 Ibid., p.394.

approach: it points to the presence of all being in the divine ground of being; first, as potential essence in the mind of God, second, as ontological dependence even in the state of estrangement, and finally, as the 'in' of ultimate fulfilment in which is accomplished the 'essentialization' of all creatures.

One could refer to this rhythm as the way from essence through existential estrangement to essentialization. It is the way from the merely potential through actual separation and reunion to fulfilment beyond the separation of potentiality and actuality. 401

This brings us back to Tillich's fundamental problem.

For Tillich, persons are always 'in' God, even in the state of estrangement. He must affirm this ontological dependence because humanity is. This means it has being, and God is being-itself. For all that Tillich tries to make estrangement a matter of ambiguity and brokenness, can it ever really be much more than a temporary imbalance in the structure of being? The structure could not be destroyed or fundamentally altered, even in the transition from essence to existence, for then persons would have slipped into nonbeing. That a person is means, by Tillich's definition, that he is organically connected with being-itself. The presence of the New Being under the conditions of estrangement is not really the appearance of anything new. As essence enters existence in Jesus the Christ, it can only reveal what is, the true, essential nature of things which firmly supports all that has being, regardless of the temporary difficulties of estrangement.

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401 Ibid., p.421.

When the truth of Christianity is thought to 'imply' the New Being, then the truth has ceased to lie with a message about the Incarnate Son of God and has been transferred to a message about the real structure of the Universe. Salvation becomes the breaking through into time and space of the power of the essential unity conquering existential estrangement; or, to put the same thing less technically, the power of the New Being within man is eternally witnessing to the wholeness of being that lies behind appearances . . . . 402

The manifestation of what is, is not without effect, of course. As already shown, the power of the New Being - the Spiritual Presence - grasps us in an ecstatic event: 'We are grasped, in the experience of faith, by the unapproachable holy which is the ground of our being and breaks into our existence and which judges us and heals us.'<sup>403</sup> This ecstatic grasping is the movement which from one point of view is called 'faith'; from another 'love.' Faith 'is the state of being grasped by the transcendent unity of unambiguous life - it embodies love as the state of being taken into that transcendent unity.'<sup>404</sup> However, since the 'transcendent' is defined by Tillich in an immanentistic way, we would expect the faith and love created by the power of the New Being to be already present as ontological realities. Indeed, our expectations are not disappointed.

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402 Hamilton, THE SYSTEM AND THE GOSPEL, p.150.

403 Tillich, THE PROTESTANT ERA, p.78.

404 Tillich, ST III, p.129.

Tillich also describes faith as 'the state of being ultimately concerned.'<sup>405</sup> This ultimate concern may express itself in many forms, but since everybody is ultimately concerned about something, Tillich affirms that 'every individual is the bearer of a special experience and content of faith.'<sup>406</sup> Thus, for example, even doubt is really faith, for doubt, after all, is concern for truth, and ultimate concern is faith. The importance this has for Tillich is clear when he testifies of his discovery of this: 'so the paradox got hold of me that he who seriously denies God, affirms him. Without it I could not have remained a theologian.'<sup>407</sup> Thus, for Tillich, 'faith is an essential possibility of man, and therefore its existence is necessary and universal.'<sup>408</sup>

So thoroughly has Tillich ontologized faith that one wonders what is unique about the Christian faith. Apparently, it is that some are distinguished from others, not because they respond to God's Word in faith, but because they have an ecstatic experience in which they realize what is common to all, namely, that humanity is essentially united with the ground of all being in spite of its estrangement.

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405 Paul Tillich, THE DYNAMICS OF FAITH, (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1957), p.1.

406 Ibid., p.55.

407 Tillich, THE PROTESTANT ERA, pp.XIV-XV.

408 Tillich, THE DYNAMICS OF FAITH, p.126. Cf. David Hopper, TILlich: A THEOLOGICAL PORTRAIT, pp.184-85. Hopper criticizes Tillich for theoretically denying to persons the possibility of choice: 'In the end the question comes down to this: does the New Testament principally and not secondarily, articulate a choice in a way of life?' (p.185).

And what of 'love'? This, too, is ontologized like faith.

'Love is an ontological concept . . . . God is love. And, since God is being-itself, one must say that being-itself is love.'<sup>409</sup>

Therefore, there is no such thing as 'being' without love; to say that a man or woman is, means necessarily that that person loves.

'Being is not actual without the love that drives everything that is toward everything else that is.'<sup>410</sup>

Again, we must wonder what distinguishes Christian love from the love which undergirds all reality. Presumably, it is with love as with faith: the real difference is in the degree of cognitive awareness provided by the ecstatic experience of being grasped by the power of the New Being. Clearly, though, in the case of both faith and love, the 'grasping' adds nothing essentially (ontologically) new to one's being for being itself, by definition, is impossible without faith and love.

So now we raise again the question of what salvation ('healing') really is in the Tillichian system. With a separation that is not really a separation, an estrangement that is not ultimately estranging, does not Tillich end up with a Saviour who really does not save, and a Christian life which is essentially no different from any other life?

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409 Tillich, ST I, p.279.

410 Paul Tillich, LOVE, POWER, AND JUSTICE - ONTOLOGICAL ANALYSES AND ETHICAL APPLICATIONS (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), p.25. Hamilton argues that Tillich's stress on love as the drive toward unity makes eros his controlling concept in such a way that there is no room left in his system for the biblical agape. See Hamilton, THE SYSTEM AND THE GOSPEL, p.105.

## C. Ontological Monism

We have witnessed an inner contradiction which runs through the heart of Tillich's theology. He seeks to hold together in one ontology a radical transcendentalism and a radical immanentalism. This leads, in the first instance, to the dualism between essence and existence, which could only result in a conception of salvation as salvation from human existence. His immanentalism, on the other hand, cuts against this with the fact that persons, as beings, can never really be separated from the ground of being - the final soteriological implication of which is that nothing essentially happens in Christ other than the manifestation of what is. What finally is the outcome of this tension in his theology? Do the two radically different approaches equally balance each other so that we are left to bounce back and forth between them with no clear resolution? I think not.

The scale tilts, as it were, toward his ontological monism in the end. This is the inevitable consequence of beginning with an abstract transcendentalism. By seeking to maintain thoroughly the transcendent otherness of God, Tillich defined God in such a way that in the end the distinction between God and humanity was swept away. Because his radical transcendentalism is defined by means of a radical immanentalism, the latter finally must be the dominant theme. In one telling sentence, Tillich sums up the triumph of ontological monism: 'Unity embraces itself and separation, just as being comprises itself and non-being.'<sup>411</sup> In other words,

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411 Tillich, LOVE, POWER AND JUSTICE, p.25.



while separation and non-being - estrangement and finitude - may be penultimate realities, they are not ultimate: the unity of being finally embraces everything, even its opposite. All reality is gathered up into the all-powerful homogeneity of being-itself.

The boundary between the reality of God and the reality of the world threatens to become confused. God seems to become so worldly, and the world so divine, that both begin to lose their outline, God his deity and the world its worldliness. 412

To raise finally the question whether Tillich's theology destroys any ontological distinction between the Church and the world is almost superfluous. A theology which comes very near to doing away with the distinction between God and humanity by means of an embracing ontological monism is certainly not going to make an ontological distinction between the Church and the world. For if the Church is, then it has being, and like all being it is grounded in being-itself. To posit any sort of essential distinction between the Church and the world would be tantamount, for Tillich's theology, to affirming a split within being-itself - a clearly intolerable option, for God is indivisible, the unity of all things.

Tillich prefers the term 'Spiritual Community' to Church. Churches are torn apart by all the ambiguities of life, especially the ambiguities of religion. 'The Spiritual Community does not exist as an entity beside the churches, but it is their Spiritual

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412 Zahrtnt, THE QUESTION OF GOD, p.335.

essence, effective in them through its power, its structure, and its fight against their ambiguities.'<sup>413</sup> Another way of putting it is that the Spiritual Community is 'the inner telos of the churches and that as such it is the source of everything which makes them churches.'<sup>414</sup>

The churches, as institutions of religion, have three important groups of functions: the functions of constitution, related to their foundation in the Spiritual Community; the functions of expansion, related to the universal claim of the Spiritual Community; and the functions of construction, related to the actualizing of the Spiritual potentialities of the churches.<sup>415</sup> These functions all participate in the ambiguities of life, but in the power of the Spiritual Presence the ambiguities are overcome. As the community of the New Being, the Spiritual Community participates in the transcendent unity of unambiguous Divine Life. It is, therefore, holy - a holiness which manifests itself in faith and love.<sup>416</sup>

Momentarily, this may indicate to us a certain distinction between the Church and the world - until we remember that all being participates in Divine Life (indeed, is 'grounded' in it), and that all being possesses faith and love. If there is any distinction whatever in Tillich's theology, it can only be the relatively minor

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413 Tillich, ST III, p.163.

414 Ibid., p.165.

415 Ibid., p.182. For a detailed description of these 'functions,' see pp.182-216.

416 Ibid., pp. 155-56; 173-77.

difference, at the penultimate level, between those who are ecstatically made cognitively aware of what is true for all and those who are still blinded by the ambiguities of estrangement. However, there can be no ultimate distinction in essence, for all being is one: it is as indivisible as God himself.

If the Spiritual Community is not identical with the Church, how does Tillich understand its relationship with other communities, as for example, other religious groups? In answer to this question, Tillich distinguishes between the latent and manifest Spiritual Community, and this is how he explains the difference:

Latency is the state of being partly actual, partly potential; one cannot attribute latency to that which is merely potential, for example, the reception of Jesus as the Christ by those who have not yet encountered him. In the state of latency, there must be actualized elements and elements not actualized. And this is just what characterizes the latent Spiritual Community. There is the Spiritual Presence's impact in faith and love; but the ultimate criterion of both faith and love, the transcendent union of unambiguous life as it is manifest in the faith and the love of the Christ is lacking. Therefore the Spiritual Community in its latency is open to profanization and demonization without an adequate principle of resistance, whereas the Spiritual Community organized as a church has the principle of resistance in itself and is able to apply it self-critically, as in the movements of prophetism and Reformation. 417

What is the difference? Simply this: in the latent Church the 'criterion' is lacking; that is to say, the knowledge of the manifestation of unambiguous faith and love in Jesus the Christ

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417 Ibid., pp.153-54.

is absent. Nevertheless, faith and love are present in the latent Church, though sometimes open to distortion through ignorance. As examples of the latent Church, Tillich lists the people of Israel, Islamic communities, the communities worshipping 'the great mythological gods,' Greek philosophical schools, and classical mysticism in Asia and Europe.<sup>418</sup> In all these communities, Tillich tells us, 'there are elements of faith in the sense of being grasped by an ultimate concern, and there are elements of love in the sense of a transcendent reunion of the separated.'<sup>419</sup> We should ask, however, why any group should be excluded from Tillich's list, for has he not already made faith and love constituent elements of being? Does this not mean, therefore, that if any group is, it is a Spiritual Community in its latent form? George Tavard sums up this problem in Tillich's system well when he writes:

Instead of erecting the holy community out of the world it sees the whole world as already being the holy community. Nobody escapes it. All, even unawares, belong to it. Is this still the Christian faith? 420

Thus we have shown that Tillich, too, has obliterated any ontological distinction between the Church and the world by means of an immanentism which threatens even the distinction between God and man. Whereas Bonhoeffer lost this distinction 'from below,'

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418 Ibid., p.154.

419 Ibid.

420 Tavard, PAUL TILlich AND THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE, pp.38-39.

through an incarnationalism, Tillich lost it 'from above,' through a radical transcendentalism. The effects are the same; the starting-points vastly different.

The great irony which cuts through Tillich's system is that he endeavoured with all his considerable powers of reason to define God in a manner that truly protected his holy otherness. He championed with great rigour the transcendence of God. And, it should be added to his credit, he sought to understand what this means for all reality - not simply theology, but also philosophy, history, culture, politics, psychology (to name a few of his concerns). Yet, because he relied so thoroughly on the power of human reason to take up and evaluate the different sources of truth, he effectively imprisoned God with an abstract transcendentalism. For all his carefully reasoned effort to push God beyond the heavens into the depths of being, in order to maintain the infinite distinction between God and humanity, he ended with an almost complete loss of that distinction and a God firmly bound by Tillich's conception of holiness.

Surely the first aspect of transcendence that must be recognized by theology is freedom. If God is absolutely transcendent, is he not absolutely free - free even from human definitions of 'transcendence'? Now if we grant this, then we must affirm his freedom to create beings alongside his being, and his freedom to reveal himself in any way he chooses - perhaps even by manifesting his greatness through the power of self-emptying humility, by becoming 'small' for us.<sup>421</sup>

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421 See Chapters V and VI.

The corollary to this is that for our part we can only receive what he gives us to know about himself. If the God whom we would know is transcendent, then we must hear the Word he speaks concerning himself, or we have nothing but a 'God' delimited by our notions of transcendence. All the more is this the case if we accept (as we should) Tillich's often brilliant description of the estranging effects of sin. What is surprising is that Tillich could argue with such persuasiveness for the brokenness of human existence, and yet, in the existence of his own person, rise to such an unambiguous panoramic view of the unity of all reality! As Karl Barth reminded Tillich, 'our standpoint is neither the time of creation nor that of redemption, and therefore it is not that of a far side of being. It is the present between the times, the time of the regnum gratiae,'<sup>422</sup> Perhaps when we stand on the other side of eternity, we shall be given the divine perspective and see the now hidden unity of all being. But until then 'we see through a glass darkly.' The brokenness of our present existence includes the distorted myopia of reason's eyes. This is not to say that we can know nothing of ultimate reality; it is only to confess that what we may know is only that which is given to us. We are dependent on revelation. By starting with an abstract idea of transcendence,

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422 Karl Barth, CD I/1, p.48.

Tillich has by-passed the starting-point of Christian theology, namely, an authoritative kerygma, and for that reason has cut himself loose from the specific ground out of which all Christian thinking grows.<sup>423</sup>

As Hannah Tillich described her husband's last days in the hospital, she wrote:

I had not brought anything to the hospital since he had been ill, except his Bibles - a small Greek New Testament, a German Bible, which had been his from his first year of life, and an English version. I had hoped to read from the Bible to him when he became restless, if he wished me to, but he had only touched the Greek version with his frail hand. He did not wish to see the other Bibles or have the Bible read to him. I was glad. He belonged to the world, to the cosmos, not to one book. 424

What a person wishes to have read to him on his deathbed is no doubt irrelevant to the truth or falsehood of his theology. But Hannah Tillich's joy that he belonged 'to the cosmos, not to one book' can only be balanced by Christian theology's sorrow that he was not more dependent on that 'one book,' for therein is the only way to know the God of the cosmos.

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423 Hamilton, THE SYSTEM AND THE GOSPEL, p.29.

424 Hannah Tillich, FROM TIME TO TIME, p.224.

## CHAPTER III

## THE LOSS OF DISTINCTION FROM THE BEGINNING:

FUTURE AND WHOLENESS IN THE  
THEOLOGY OF WOLFHART PANNENBERG

Madness! that reason lodged in human heads  
Should hope to traverse backward and unweave  
The infinite path Three-personed Substance treads.

Content you with the quia, sons of Eve:  
For had you power to see the whole truth plain  
No need had been for Mary to conceive . . . 425

## A. History As A Whole

Precisely because of the quia, the effects of God's activity in human history, Wolfhart Pannenberg believes the sons of Eve have the power to see the whole truth plain. It is not madness, according to him, but in accordance with the reasonable nature of human existence that human beings should not only hope, but actually be able, to traverse backward and unweave the infinite path Three-personed Substance treads.

And it is the whole truth that concerns Pannenberg most. Though not incorrectly considered an eschatological theologian, a passion for the future does not seem to be his starting-point. Rather, his thinking begins with the question of the truth of the whole.<sup>426</sup> Isolated

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425 Dante Alighieri, THE DIVINE COMEDY - PURGATORY, trans. Dorothy L. Sayers (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1955), p.89.

426 Robert W. Jenson, GOD AFTER GOD - THE GOD OF THE PAST AND THE GOD OF THE FUTURE, SEEN IN THE WORK OF KARL BARTH (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1969), p.175. Pannenberg confirmed this interpretation of his thought: 'Robert Jenson . . . rightly says that my thought does not start with the future as do other approaches of eschatological theology . . . . But I start with a concern for wholeness of meaning . . . . Everything I say about the end and eschatology is an extrapolation from this. I agree with this kind of analysis.' Wolfhart Pannenberg, 'A Theological Conversation With Wolfhart Pannenberg,' DIALOG 11 (1972): 287.



facts, existing as disparate phenomena, are unable to lead one to understand the meaning of existence, for

the question of meaning gives rise to the concern for context. Each of us experiences life in bits and pieces - as fragments in a nexus of fragments. The meaning of each fragment cannot be grasped as a thing in itself, but only in its wider contexts . . . . 427

Ultimate meaning, therefore, can be known only in the context of the whole, and since 'history is reality in its totality,'<sup>428</sup> truth becomes visible only in the light of universal history. 'The wholeness of reality which Pannenberg seeks is the wholeness of history.'<sup>429</sup>

History as a unity is a necessary presupposition before any of its particular events make sense.<sup>430</sup> However, contingency and individuality are also fundamental characteristics of the historical. The unity of history must therefore be conceived in such a way that the radical contingency of individual historical events is maintained. Thus Pannenberg rejects any interpretation of history which tends to suppress openness to a contingent future. Though the principle of analogy is indispensable for the historian, an exclusive dependence

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427 Carl Braaten, 'Theology and Our Common World,' WORLDVIEW, September 1972, p.23.

428 Wolfhart Pannenberg, BASIC QUESTIONS IN THEOLOGY, 3 vols., trans. George H. Kehm and R. A. Wilson (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1970-1973), 1:21 (hereafter cited as Pannenberg, BQT).

429 Jenson, GOD AFTER GOD, p.175.

430 Pannenberg, BQT, 1:68.

upon it to fix the limits of historical knowledge must be ruled out, for it presupposes the similarity of all events instead of their uniqueness. Also, teleological approaches are unacceptable because a future which evolves out of the past denies history the necessary openness to the radically new future. Likewise, all morphological conceptions of historical unity (e.g., Spengler, Toynbee) are inadequate because 'the genuinely historical is always to be sought in precisely the variations and modifications of the typical.'<sup>431</sup> And though Hegel's system should be regarded as 'the most significant attempt',<sup>432</sup> at a solution to the problem of historical unity, it finally must also be rejected. While Pannenberg is deeply appreciative of Hegel's quest for a universal history, and his belief that truth is not timelessly unchangeable but a process which will finally be revealed only at the end, he objects

that the horizon of the future is lost in Hegel's thought. He had to understand his own position as the end of history in order to be able to think of the unity of history. The unity of history - and thus of truth - comes into view only from the end. Theologically, this means that Hegel no longer had an open future, an eschatology before him . . . . future truth is necessarily excluded from his system. 433

The only adequate conception of the unity of history will be one which protects the contingency of events. Pannenberg is led, therefore, to posit a common root: 'The God who by the transcendence of his freedom is the origin of contingency in the world, is also

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431 Ibid.

432 Ibid., 2:22.

433 Ibid., 1:74-75.

the ground of the unity which comprises the contingencies as history.'<sup>434</sup>  
 The concept of God is not simply a matter for theology, but is  
 'indispensable for the historian.'<sup>435</sup>

And if God is indispensable for the historian, history is  
 indispensable for the theologian. The first reason is that 'the  
 word "God" is used meaningfully only if one means by it the power  
 that determines everything that exists.'<sup>436</sup> The task of theology  
 thus goes beyond its special theme, the revelation of God in  
 Jesus Christ as attested in the Scriptures, and includes 'all truth  
 whatever';<sup>437</sup> that is to say, universal history. The second reason  
 follows from the specific character of Scripture itself. Pannenberg  
 maintains that the

universal-historical thinking has its origin in the  
 biblical idea of God. It was the biblical God who  
 first gave rise to an understanding of the totality  
 of reality as a history of ever new, once-occurring  
 events directed toward a final goal, in contrast to  
 the Greek understanding of the world as a constantly  
 uniform order of events. 438

Consequently 'history is the most comprehensive horizon of Christian  
 theology.'<sup>439</sup>

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434 Ibid., 1:74-75.

435 Ibid., 1:76.

436 Ibid., 1:1.

437 Ibid.

438 Ibid., 1:12.

439 Ibid., 1:15.

Pannenberg is anxious to defend his views on two fronts: on the one side, against the existential theology of Bultmann and Gogarten which dissolves history into the historicity of existence; on the other side, against the thesis that the real content of faith is suprahistorical - a view developed by Martin Kähler in the tradition of Heilsgeschichte and one which lives on in Barth's interpretation of the incarnation as Urgeschichte.

Both theological positions, that of pure historicity and that of the suprahistorical ground of faith, have a common extra-theological motive. Their common starting point is to be seen in the fact that critical-historical investigation as the scientific verification of events did not seem to leave any more room for redemptive events. Therefore the theology of redemptive history fled into the harbor of a suprahistory - or with Barth, of pre-history. 440

Pannenberg seeks to make space for Christian theology in the post-Enlightenment world, not by retreating into the supposed safety of an authoritarian 'Word of God' revealed in a suprahistorical manner, but by advancing on to the intellectual ground of our age and demonstrating that the concept of God, and especially the Christian conception of God, is unavoidable. If modern historical criticism has successfully routed theology and caused it to beat a hasty retreat, leaving even reason behind in its flight toward the impenetrable fortress of pure subjectivity, Pannenberg reverses the attack and seeks to show both history and theology that God is necessary for an adequate interpretation of history, and history is fundamental for a theology of God.

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440 Ibid., 1:16. The justification of Pannenberg's criticism on this matter is questionable. Cf. Barth, CD IV/3, pp.179-80; and Chapter VI of this thesis.

History is a requisite for theology because revelation is a historical event.<sup>441</sup> Revelation is the self-disclosure of God manifested indirectly through his actions in human history. The events of history have within themselves an inherent meaning openly visible to the eyes of impartial investigation. It is not for the theologian to interpret the meaning of otherwise opaque events on the basis of a suprahistorical revelation of hidden meaning. The meaning inheres in the events in such a way that ordinary scientific history is able to grasp the revelation of God in his indirect self-disclosure. There will, of course, be differences of opinion about the meaning of events, but critical-historical study is the means of resolving such differences. 'The history which purports to be revelatory must be studied in its continuity with the rest of history. Precisely the same methods of investigation and criteria of verification are applicable.'<sup>442</sup> The investigation of God occurs in ordinary history, and it must be approached in the same spirit of rationality as we approach any other phenomena within the continuity of historical happenings. God has revealed his deity, not in a higher glossolalia known only to the faithful, but in the ordinary language of historical facts.<sup>443</sup>

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441 For a concise summary of Pannenberg's view of revelation as history, see 'Dogmatic Theses on The Doctrine of Revelation' in REVELATION AS HISTORY, ed. Wolfhart Pannenberg and trans. David Granskou (London: Collier-Macmillan Ltd., 1968), pp.123-55. Though this doctrine is not peculiar to Pannenberg, 'he has upheld it with a thorough-going emphasis peculiarly his own. It is the key concept of his theology.' Allan D. Galloway, WOLFHART PANNENBERG (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1973), p.35.

442 Ibid., p.40.

443 Pannenberg, REVELATION AS HISTORY, p.137.

Since every historical event has an inherent revelatory meaning, we might be led to assume there are numerous 'revelations.' That, however, would negate the definition of revelation as the self-disclosure of the one God. Therefore, 'revelation must be understood as comprehending the entirety of God's activity.'<sup>444</sup> Thus it was that the Israelite conception of revelation held that it is

only when the revealing events are completed that they can produce knowledge of the deity of Yahweh as, so to speak, their last act . . . . The power to manifest Yahweh's deity is, in fact, not attributed only to this or that individual event, but is increasingly ascribed to the whole pattern of events. 445

As the prophets of the exile reflected on Israel's loss of the land, they could no longer accept that individual events of their history were the ultimate self-revelation and self-vindication of Yahweh. The decisive revelation of Yahweh was pushed more and more into the future. Apocalypticism 'for the first time regarded all that happens as a single history, at the end of which the glory of Yahweh will be made manifest.'<sup>446</sup>

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444 E. Frank Tupper, THE THEOLOGY OF WOLFHART PANNENBERG, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1973), p.86. See also Pannenberg, REVELATION AS HISTORY, p.131: 'Revelation is not comprehended completely in the beginning, but at the end of revelatory history.'

445 Wolfhart Pannenberg, FAITH AND REALITY, trans. John Maxwell (London: Search Press, 1977), p.56.

446 Ibid., p.57. Pannenberg's understanding of the development and meaning of apocalyptic, though central to his theology as a whole, has by no means met with general approval. Hans Dieter Betz ('The Concept of Apocalyptic in the Theology of the Pannenberg Group' in JOURNAL FOR THEOLOGY AND THE CHURCH, ed. Robert W. Funk (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969), pp.192-207) argues that it is completely uncertain that apocalypticism developed out of Old Testament prophecy (p.200), and that 'universal history is not the central theme of apocalyptic thought' (p.202). Also, William R. Murdock ('History and Revelation In Jewish Apocalypticism,' INTERPRETATION 21 (1967): 167-87) contends that apocalyptic thought saw the eschaton, not as glorious fulfilment of history, but as the final divine assertion of sovereignty against a history dominated by a demonic will.

As would be expected, it is no insignificant matter for Pannenberg that modern biblical studies have revealed the importance of apocalyptic thought in understanding the development of the New Testament writings. Understanding the life and fate of Jesus Christ against this background, Pannenberg believes that in him the end of history has been anticipated in such a way that we can understand history as a unity without minimizing its provisionality and contingency. The end toward which apocalypticism looked - the unity of history and therefore the full revelation of God - has entered the present in an anticipatory way through Jesus of Nazareth. This is the key which unlocks the post-Hegelian problem we are faced with as we seek to understand the meaning of universal history from its end without compromising the actual relativity of all thought and the openness necessary for those who know themselves not yet at the goal.<sup>447</sup> 'An understanding of history as a whole is made possible for the first time because the end of history is already present.'<sup>448</sup>

Before examining Pannenberg's christology in more detail, we should pause to consider a question he raises: Can the apocalyptic conceptual world still be meaningful for us?<sup>449</sup> Pannenberg presents

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447 Pannenberg, BQT, 1:181.

448 Ibid., 1:36.

449 Wolfhart Pannenberg, JESUS - GOD AND MAN, trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane Priebe (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1968), p.82 (hereafter cited as Pannenberg, JGM).



a clear answer; but first we may well inquire why he feels constrained to ask it. After all, is he not concerned to free theology from the subjectivism he perceives in the theology of both Barth and Bultmann?<sup>450</sup> Pannenberg explicitly rejects the use of contemporary experience as the point of departure for theology (which he believes originates with Schleiermacher and the Erlangen Lutheran school of the nineteenth century). Because personal experience is too untrustworthy, faith must be grounded outside of itself in the events of history, he contends.<sup>451</sup>

Then what difference does it make whether or not we find apocalyptic thought meaningful? It matters to Pannenberg, as I understand it, because he is so largely motivated by an apologetic concern. He very much wants to get theology out of the ghetto of the faithful and into the marketplace of the world's ideas. At its basis, his theology affirms a universal history of God's revelation that is openly accessible to any with eyes to see it. From this conviction of its inherent rationality he takes the argument into another realm to demonstrate further its reasonable nature; i.e., he argues from an anthropological level. In so doing, however, the enemy sneaks in

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450 See Richard John Neuhaus, 'Wolfhart Pannenberg: Profile of a Theologian' in Pannenberg's THEOLOGY AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), pp.15-16 (hereafter cited as Pannenberg, TKG).

451 Pannenberg, JGM, pp.25-27. 'Only on the basis of what happened in the past, not because of present experiences, do we know that Jesus lives as the exalted Lord . . . . No one now has an experience of him as risen and exalted, at least not an experience that could be distinguished with certainty from illusion' (ibid., p.28).



the back door, and he appears himself to be very anthropocentric! Referring to Jesus, Pannenberg writes: . . . 'if at that time the revelation of God took place for all men and times, it will also stand the test of men's experience of reality today.'<sup>452</sup>

According to Pannenberg, the revelation of God does indeed stand the test of human experience today. If Barth considered religion the negative consequence of humanity's sinful will to self-justification, and Bonhoeffer discovered a religionless age, Pannenberg takes the natural religiousness of humanity as a pre-supposition,<sup>453</sup> and argues from this for the reasonableness of the concept of God. Human beings are distinguished from the rest of nature in that they have an openness to the world. Animals have an environment, but humans transcend their environment, they have a world.

Since the individual man relates himself to the still outstanding wholeness of his own existence, he relates himself to the whole of the world and its history. In this way he also relates himself to God as the mysterious power that constitutes this - absent - wholeness. 454

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452 Pannenberg, FAITH AND REALITY, p.63 [*italics mine*]. See also THE APOSTLES' CREED IN THE LIGHT OF TODAY'S QUESTIONS, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1972), p.104 (hereafter cited as Pannenberg, AC); BQT, 1:10; 2:25-26, 237; 3:88-89, 104-5, 107; THEOLOGY AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE, trans. Francis McDonagh (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1976), p.310.

453 William Hamilton, 'The Character of Pannenberg's Theology,' in THEOLOGY AS HISTORY, ed. James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr. (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p.178. Hamilton finds this notion hard to take: 'It is rather hard to understand, or take seriously, a theology that can by a definition dispose of the secularism which has been an important segment of Western history for the past four hundred years' (p.180).

454 Pannenberg, BQT, 1:171. See also AC, pp.23-24.

The question of God, therefore, is not a special concern for the 'religious.' 'It arises out of the very structure of human existence and is thus the most fundamental and universal concern of all mankind.'<sup>455</sup> Because humanity relates itself naturally to a still outstanding wholeness, hope belongs to the essence of conscious human existence.<sup>456</sup> 'Thus, because of the structure of human existence, it is necessary for man in one way or another to conceive of the fulfilment of his destiny and indeed of the totality of his existence beyond death.'<sup>457</sup>

Can the apocalyptic conceptual world still be meaningful for us? Yes! answers Pannenberg, for just as post-exilic Israel longed for the final manifestation of God's glory, which would bring with it the resurrection from the dead and the consummation of God's revelation in history, so we also hope for a final fulfilment that will gather up the fragments of our existence into a meaningful whole.

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455 Galloway, WOLFHART PANNENBERG, p.16.

456 Pannenberg, JGM, p.85.

457 Ibid., p.86. See also WHAT IS MAN?, trans. Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), p.43.

### B. The Beginning at the End.

The mission and fate of Jesus Christ are understandable only when viewed in the context of apocalyptic hope<sup>458</sup> - both Israel's and ours. The critical affirmation about Jesus Christ is this: in him the end of history is present in proleptic form. We can make this statement, not as a blind 'leap of faith,' but as the outcome of a rational investigation of the historical event of Christ's resurrection. We, too,

must still understand the resurrection of Jesus as a historical event which happened at a specific time: as a reality, and not a mere hallucination, even though we can designate it only by means of images. The resurrection of Jesus is to be viewed as a historical event in this sense, namely, that the disciples of Jesus were overwhelmed by a reality which confronted them, and for which not only they, but we, too, have no other explanation and therefore no other designation than the symbolic talk about the 'resurrection from the dead.' 459

The event of Christ's resurrection means at least three things, according to Pannenberg:

(1) Since apocalyptic hope looked forward to the resurrection of the dead as an end-time occurrence, the end has taken place in Jesus' resurrection. (Modern men and women readily identify with the fact of Jesus' bodily resurrection, because now we find unacceptable any dualism between mind and body - such as is found in the Greek notion of the immortality of the soul.<sup>460</sup>) The wholeness for which

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458 Pannenberg, REVELATION AS HISTORY, p.145. See also John Cobb, Jr., 'Wolfhart Pannenberg's "Jesus: God and Man,"' THE JOURNAL FOR RELIGION 49 (1969): 195; and Galloway, WOLFHART PANNENBERG, p.65.

459 Pannenberg, BQT, 2:26. For a concise summary of his apologetic defense of the historical resurrection, see 'Did Jesus Really Rise From The Dead?', DIALOG 4 (1965): 128-35. For a fuller account, see JGM, pp.88-106.

460 Pannenberg, WHAT IS MAN?, pp.45-51.

Israel hoped and for which we, too, hope - the wholeness that is possible only at the end of universal history - has proleptically appeared in the event of Christ's resurrection.

(2) Through the resurrection it is confirmed (retroactively) that Jesus is, and always has been, one with God.<sup>461</sup> Revelation, we have heard Pannenberg argue, must be the self-manifestation of God which can be accomplished fully only at the end of universal history, in the totality of all historical events. But since the end has appeared in Jesus' resurrection, he must be God himself present in his revelation.<sup>462</sup>

The assertion of Jesus' pre-existence as Son of God is therefore nothing more than a conclusion drawn from Jesus' unity with God himself in his revelation. It includes Jesus' oneness of nature with God. For otherwise God would not be revealed as himself in his revelation of Jesus. 463

However, Jesus understood himself as a Son, distinct from God his Father. 'If Jesus' history and his person now belong to the essence, to the divinity of God, then the distinction that Jesus maintained between himself and the Father also belongs to the divinity of God.'<sup>464</sup> In this way Pannenberg comes to the trinity 'from below,'<sup>465</sup> rejecting the speculative 'Logos christology'

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461 Pannenberg, JGM, p.136.

462 Ibid., p.141.

463 Pannenberg, AC, p.68.

464 Pannenberg, JGM, p.159.

465 Similarly, the Spirit is fully present in the revelation event of the resurrection as the origin of all life (AC, p.133), and is therefore one with God in his revelational unity. Yet the Spirit is an independent person over against the Son and Father 'because he leads us to glorify the Son and Father and thereby demonstrates himself to be distinct from both' (JGM, p.179).

that begins 'from above.'<sup>466</sup>

(3) The pre-Easter activity of Jesus was authenticated by God through the resurrection. This is significant for (a) his death, and (b) his teaching.

a. The death of Jesus is universally efficacious for human destiny because in the light of the resurrection of Jesus we see that those involved have switched places: now those who crucified Jesus as a blasphemer are shown to be the real blasphemers themselves, since Jesus has now been owned by God. In the strict sense, then, Jesus died in their stead - for their crime of blasphemy. And because those who condemned Jesus acted as the official office-bearers of the people, the vicarious power of Jesus' death extends to all Israel, and indeed, to everyone, since the Jewish nation was elected by God to represent the whole of humanity. These facts provide the essential basis for the Christian assertion of the vicarious nature of Christ's death.<sup>467</sup>

Therefore, the godforsakenness of death is overcome for all humanity. No longer must anyone die alone and hopeless, for our community with Jesus extends through death into the future participation in the new life that has already appeared in him.<sup>468</sup>

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466 Ibid., pp.160ff. Tupper has concisely summarized Pannenberg's reasons for rejecting an incarnational christology 'from above.' Such a method (1) arbitrarily presupposes the divinity of Jesus (the most important christological task is to present the reasons for such a confession), (2) devalues the constitutive significance of the historical Jesus of Nazareth, and (3) forces the believer to try to stand in an impossible position - the position of God. WOLFHART PANNENBERG, pp.131-32.

467 Pannenberg, AC, pp.84-85.

468 Pannenberg, JGM, p.269.

b. Rejecting attempts to make Jesus' claim to authority the basis of christology, as though the only crucial matter was a person's 'decision' for or against him, Pannenberg contends that only the resurrection confirms his pre-Easter works, and grants authority to his claim.<sup>469</sup> 'Jesus' works are legitimated materially through what has become revealed in Jesus himself through his fate.'<sup>470</sup> The resurrection gave authentication to Jesus' central message: the imminence of God's kingdom.<sup>471</sup> If God has raised Jesus from the dead, then that means his proclamation about God and his rule are true.

What, specifically, did Jesus teach? The starting point for his message was the Jewish apocalyptic hope for the future kingdom of God. He modified it, however, by stressing that it does not lie in the distant future but is imminent. Thus, the present is not independent from it; rather, since the future is so close it makes 'an imperative claim upon the present, alerting all men to the urgency and exclusiveness of seeking first the Kingdom of God.'<sup>472</sup>

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469 Ibid., p.66.

470 Ibid., p.210. Notice the distinction Pannenberg makes between the activity and fate of Jesus. This is central to his thought. Jesus actively proclaimed the imminence of the kingdom in word and deed, but he passively received the fate of death and resurrection.

471 Pannenberg, TKG, p.53. In JGM Pannenberg discusses the traditional doctrine of the three offices of Christ, and concludes that while the titles 'prophet,' 'priest,' and 'king' are not without meaning, they nevertheless are not accurate in the strictest sense. Therefore, we are on more secure ground simply to understand Jesus' office as the one sent to call men to the kingdom of God (see pp. 212-35).

472 Pannenberg, TKG, p.54.

Even though the future rule of God is not distant but near, and therefore impinges upon the present, it is nonetheless future. We must give 'priority to the future'<sup>473</sup> as we seek to understand what Jesus taught about God's kingdom. For 'what Jesus did was simply to face men with the personal decision for or against the future of God.'<sup>474</sup> The traditional Jewish expectation of the coming reign of God on earth became for Jesus the decisive and all-encompassing content of a person's relation to God.<sup>475</sup> Obedience to God means turning toward his future (and therefore to God himself). Jesus' message of the kingdom 'called men out of the securities of their everyday way of life and thereby unmasked the provisional character of all inner-worldly forms and fulfillments of life,'<sup>476</sup> as it pointed to the ultimacy of the approaching future of God.

It is clear that Jesus thought the kingdom was so imminent it would appear in his own generation. There is no doubt, therefore, that he erred in this matter. However - and this is decisive! - his imminent expectation did not remain unfulfilled. 'It was fulfilled by himself, insofar as the eschatological reality of the resurrection of the dead appeared in Jesus himself.'<sup>477</sup> His resurrection

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473 Ibid.

474 Pannenberg, AC, p.51.

475 Pannenberg, TKG, p.133.

476 Pannenberg, JGM, p.226.

477 Ibid.



was, in fact, the appearance of God's future, though not in its final fulfilment but only in proleptic form.<sup>478</sup>

Frank Tupper has suggested that 'perhaps the truly novel, radical dimension of Pannenberg's theology is his doctrine of God.'<sup>479</sup> Pannenberg defines God as 'the power of the future.'<sup>480</sup> He comes to this definition, first by way of his belief that the unity of all things can be known only at the end of universal history, which means God (the unity of all things) is to be fully known only as a future reality. Secondly, his biblical-historical study has convinced him that in Jesus the end has appeared as a present reality through the resurrection, which, in turn, shows that God has confirmed the teaching of Jesus. Reduced to a syllogism, what Pannenberg is saying

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<sup>478</sup> From the foregoing, it should be obvious that, for Pannenberg, Jesus proclaimed a kingdom that is totally future. Inasmuch as the future is considered imminent, it influences the present in a decisive way, but that does not minimize the kingdom's futurity. As will be seen below, this is a critical assumption upon which Pannenberg builds much of his theology. It is, however, a very vulnerable position. Modern biblical theology has swung from the view that Jesus proclaimed a kingdom that is wholly future (Weiss-Schweitzer), through believing that it is totally present in his life (C. H. Dodd), to the presently held consensus that it is both present in Jesus Christ and future in its final fulfilment. For a thorough presentation of the options, see Norman Perrin, THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE TEACHING OF JESUS (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1963). Perrin concludes: '... it can be shown there are aspects of the teaching of Jesus in which the Kingdom is present, and further aspects in which it is future. . . ' (p.185) It is not surprising, therefore, that Perrin, in reviewing JGM, wrote: 'This use of selected results of historical scholarship in support of a theological position is the most striking feature of the book . . . ' (Norman Perrin, 'Putting the Clock Back,' THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY 85 (December 11, 1968): 1575-76.

<sup>479</sup> Tupper, WOLFHART PANNENBERG, p.285.

<sup>480</sup> Pannenberg, BQT, 3:210.



is this: omnipotence is constitutive for the being of God;<sup>481</sup> Jesus proclaimed the future reign of God, and the truth of this claim was confirmed by God himself through the Easter event; therefore, God himself is future. 'Thus it is necessary to say that, in a restricted but important sense, God does not yet exist. Since his rule and his being are inseparable, God's being is still in the process of coming to be.'<sup>482</sup> This in no way minimizes the eternity of God, because God has always been the future of even the most distant past. 'He existed as the future that has been powerful in every present. Thus, the futurity of God implies his eternity.'<sup>483</sup> Only when the kingdom comes will the statement 'God exists' prove to be definitely true because it is this future which has always been powerfully simultaneous with every time.<sup>484</sup>

By thus emphasizing the 'ontological primacy of the future of the kingdom over all present realities,'<sup>485</sup> Pannenberg believes he has made possible an understanding of freedom that is not inconsistent with God's omnipotence. If God is the power of the future, then that makes freedom genuinely possible for both God and humanity. Since God 'is the ultimate future,' he should be conceived as pure freedom,

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481 Pannenberg, TKG, p.56.

482 Ibid.

483 Pannenberg, BQT, 2:224.

484 Pannenberg, TKG, p.62.

485 Pannenberg, BQT, 2:240.

'for what is freedom but to have future in oneself and out of oneself?',<sup>486</sup>

And humans also discover a new freedom when they no longer think of God as an existent being. The atheists have helped theology face the fact that God's omnipotence logically conflicts with the freedom of humanity - if God 'exists' in a static sort of way. Human freedom consists of possibilities not yet realized, of possessing a future.<sup>487</sup>

As the power of the future, God therefore guarantees human freedom.

This reflection upon the power of the future over the present leads Pannenberg to a new idea of creation, oriented not toward a past primeval reality but toward the future eschaton.

The statement that all things and all beings are created through Jesus Christ means that the eschaton that has appeared beforehand in Jesus represents the time and point from which the creation took place. According to the Biblical understanding, the essence of things will be decided only in the future. What they are is decided by what they will become. Thus, the creation happens from the end, from the ultimate future. 488

The end is the beginning. Creation is not to be understood as an act that happened one time in past history; rather, it takes place constantly out of the future. 'The future lets go of itself to bring into being our present.'<sup>489</sup>

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486 Pannenberg, TKG, p.63.

487 Pannenberg, BQT, 3:111.

488 Pannenberg, JGM, p.169.

489 Pannenberg, TKG, p.59.

Pannenberg's concern for wholeness has thus led him full-circle: individual events, he asserts, are meaningful only within their contexts; each context requires a greater context, so that the final meaning will be revealed only at the end of universal history; God, by definition the power determining everything that exists, is himself the all-encompassing unity that will be revealed at the end; proleptically, he has revealed himself (as the end) in Jesus Christ; Jesus taught that the reign - and therefore the being - of God is future, and had this message confirmed by God; as future, therefore, God is the creator of individual events of history. When we speak of the future, then, it is not really as the end so much as the beginning and final integrator of every present. The future - God - is the unifying, creative power that makes possible the wholeness Pannenberg seeks.

But now we must ask about the freedom of God and humanity that Pannenberg has been so eager to demonstrate by his emphasis on the future. Has he not substituted a totalitarianism of the future that is every bit as deterministic as the traditional theology of an 'existent,' omnipotent God? Pannenberg makes much out of the fact that a property of history must be contingency, an openness to new possibilities in the future. This, he thinks, makes possible genuine human and divine freedom. At this point, however, an ambiguity in his thought surfaces. Does he really guarantee an ontological openness? It is doubtful that he does, for it appears that things are so ordered from the eschaton, in his theology,

that future events are 'contingent' only in the sense that they are hidden from view in the present. But is our ignorance about God's future the same as a genuine contingency? How does the determination of all events from the future grant us a real freedom that is not simply an illusion of ignorance? Does not this totalitarianism of the future finally minimize humanity's role as co-labourer with God in the making of history? Though he rejects theologies that start 'from above,' he has, in fact, ended with a theology that seeks to interpret history and all reality from the standpoint of God, and the interpretation that follows depreciates the human role as an active participant in the outworking of a future that is genuinely open.

Hiroshi Obayashi has written of 'an eschatological conformism' in Pannenberg's theology that undermines the human responsibility of decision and commitment:

Responsibility consists not only in an epistemological openness, but also in an ontological openness. History is not destined to a totalitarian and conformist perfection of the eschaton. That is what makes man and God responsible. 490

Is it not the case, however, that Pannenberg must deny a genuine 'ontological openness' to the future? For the eschaton is the power of creation itself, he tells us, creating all things in conformity with

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490 Hiroshi Obayashi, 'Future and Responsibility: A Critique of Pannenberg's Eschatology,' STUDIES IN RELIGION/SCIENCES RELIGIEUSES 1 (1971): 201. See also Tupper, WOLFHART PANNENBERG, p.301.

itself, determining every present and past. Openness for Pannenberg can therefore only be epistemological; that is, an 'openness' which is related only to man's knowledge or ignorance of the future. Obayashi has raised a significant problem that Pannenberg's theology seems powerless to solve.

The inevitable loss of human responsibility in Pannenberg's thought has also been seen by Daniel Day Williams. He writes:

As to the Scripture, the New Testament gives us at least two eschatological pictures of the end and not one. In one there is universal salvation. All things are made new. God's life embraces the whole, all is redeemed. In the other, God divides the good from the evil in judgment. Some are lost. We should not be diverted by pathological conceptions of hell with God willing the eternal torment of his creature. The question is whether there is a real risk of lostness in being . . . . His [Pannenberg's] final event seems to require the first option, an absolutely universal consummation which is the essence of every event, no matter what relation to good and evil it may sustain.

But I must ask, how can life be serious if in a final event it will all be one absolute good, no matter what has happened? 491

Not only does Pannenberg undercut the biblical tension between salvation and lostness in the eschaton, as Williams correctly notes, but he has difficulty explaining the fact of evil in the present - if indeed all things flow out of a future of absolute good. Pannenberg's passion for wholeness fails to account for the brokenness of sin. According to the joint testimony of Scripture and

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491 Daniel Day Williams, 'Response To Wolfhart Pannenberg,' in HOPE AND THE FUTURE OF MAN, ed. Ewert H. Cousins (London: The Garnstone Press Ltd., 1973), p.87.

human experience, there is, at least in the present, a very real dualism between good and evil, holiness and sin. Theology has traditionally understood God's activity with humanity in a sequential way: creation, fall, brokenness, reconciliation, restoration, wholeness. But Pannenberg, by beginning with the end, by taking the wholeness of salvation as his starting-point, left himself no room for human rebellion and its consequent 'sickness unto death.' In an ironical way Pannenberg has actually become a-historical(!) in that it appears that nothing really transpires between God and humanity in the events of space and time but all history becomes a theophany of God's eternal glory, flowing from the victorious end and deterministically guaranteed from the beginning.<sup>492</sup>

We are therefore not surprised to find that Pannenberg's theology finds little place within itself for the cross. The necessitas of the cross is inexplicable apart from the reality of sin. One cannot escape the impression that, for Pannenberg, brokenness is only apparent (given our present finitude), since all things will finally be shown to have always been united in the wholeness of God. Apart from a very real brokenness, the cross can only be a

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492 Tupper criticizes Pannenberg for tending to minimize 'the radicality of the destruction and brokenness within history as the expressions of the sinfulness of man' (p.301). Significantly, Pannenberg admits this in a postscript to Tupper's book. 'It is correct to say that the role played by sin, evil, suffering, destruction and brokenness in human history has not received very extensive treatment in my writings.' WOLFHART PANNENBERG, p.303.

marginal point - almost a curious oddity - in the proclamation of the Church. But of course this was not the case with the apostolic witness. 'I decided to know nothing among you,' wrote Paul to the Corinthians, 'except Jesus Christ and him crucified.'<sup>493</sup> Certainly it was the resurrection which made the early Church see the true significance of the cross and filled them with a confident boldness that came from being in fellowship with the Resurrected One in their midst, but they proclaimed that this one God raised was him who had died for the sake of the world. The victory of the resurrection pointed them not simply to the coming eschaton (though indeed they understood it as the 'first fruits'), but also to the scandal of an incredible past: the Resurrected One was none other than Jesus of Nazareth who had been nailed to the cross for humanity's reconciliation with God. Walter Kreck, referring to Pannenberg's 'resurrection theology,' summed up the problem:

'... the groundwork is laid for a Christology in which the cross as saving event seems to play no decisive role. The emphasis lies, rather, on the fact that he is the first fruits of those who are to rise from the dead.' 494

To be sure, Pannenberg does seek to explain the significance of the cross, as was shown above; but simply to affirm that Jesus innocently experienced death for the crime of blasphemy, only to have the tables turned when God raised him, while perhaps helpful in itself, does not fully explain the reason for the cross. It bears

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493 I Corinthians 2:2 [*italics mine*]

494 Walter Kreck, 'The Word of the Cross,' INTERPRETATION 24 (1970): 227.

no material relationship to the rest of Pannenberg's theology.

Why did God allow Jesus to endure the  
Godforsakenness of the cross prior to the  
eschatological fulfillment of Jesus'  
expectation of God's coming Kingdom?  
Was the cross a prerequisite to the  
eschatological appearance of God's  
Kingdom? Pannenberg fails to answer  
these crucial questions 495

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495 Tupper, WOLFHART PANNENBERG, p.300.



## C. A Provisional Witness

What place, then, does the Church have in this theology of wholeness? How does Pannenberg view the relationship between the Church and the world?

In his work on the Apostles' Creed, Pannenberg attempts to understand the meaning of the adjective 'holy' as it is applied to the catholic Church. In one hand Pannenberg wants to hold the biblical meaning of 'holy,' but with the other he grasps firmly his theology of wholeness. His attempt to fuse the two into a systematic synthesis is not very successful. The ambiguity is clear in this passage:

. . . the church's holiness describes its separation from the profane world and the fact that it belongs to God and to his activity in the world. According to biblical tradition, everything is holy which belongs to the divine sphere and which is allied to it because it has been chosen by God. It is in accordance with the Christian belief in the incarnation, moreover, that holiness does not mean separation from the world but that the church should be sanctified in the midst of the world for God and his coming. 496

It is unfortunate that Pannenberg was not more precise in his choice of words. He would have us believe that the Church is separate from the world and that the Church is not separate from the world. How something can be both 'A' and 'non-A' is difficult to

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496 Pannenberg, AC, p.146. Note also p.156 for an almost identical repetition of this idea:  
 'The holy . . . means "set aside" . . . .  
 The church is holy because it is separated from the existing world . . . . On the other hand, . . . the holiness of the church cannot mean separation from the world' . . .

understand. What is not hard to see, however, is why he was led to affirm this break with elementary logic. Forced by the creed to define the nature of the Church's holiness, Pannenberg faithfully adopted the biblical meaning inherent in the concept. However, at basis this contradicts his theology of wholeness. The idea of a Church truly separate from the profane world would seem to admit the inadmissible: a dualism in conflict with wholeness. Therefore, Pannenberg must quickly qualify his use of the word 'separate' to show that he really means 'non-separate.' When Pannenberg writes about the Church in contexts of his own choosing (not burdened by the difficulties of explaining a traditional label like 'holy') his theology of the Church's relationship to the world emerges with greater clarity.

Informing his ecclesiology is an implicit, often explicit, universalism. Admittedly, Pannenberg does not directly and unequivocally espouse a doctrine of universal salvation for all creation.<sup>497</sup> He seems reticent, for some reason, to take this step, even though the structure of his theology would appear to welcome it. He does often seem to endorse it indirectly, however, and I think it is because of his conception of a unifying future that embraces all reality. The future of all creatures is a universal one because

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497 Notice his ambivalence: 'Salvation is only guaranteed to the man who has definite communion with Jesus - and who has through this communion the hope of overcoming death with Jesus. But all other men . . . can achieve the salvation which appeared in him - even if in ways which are beyond our comprehension' (AC, p.95).

'each instance of reality has the same future.'<sup>498</sup> Exegetically, Pannenberg finds at least a hint of universal salvation in the symbolic language of Christ's descent into hell. He believes 'it asserts that men outside the visible church are not automatically excluded from salvation.'<sup>499</sup> Therefore, he can write, in various contexts:

. . . whether they know it and want it or not, all things and all men are subject to the lordship of Christ. . . 500

. . . Jesus' resurrection allowed the destiny of all men to a life of nearness to God, as Jesus had proclaimed it, to appear in him. 501

. . . the future salvation of the whole of mankind has already appeared in the history of Jesus and especially in his resurrection from the dead. 502

. . . the Kingdom of God will comprise all mankind. 503

This universalistic emphasis is crucial for an understanding of how Pannenberg sees the Church in the world. Since all humanity has a common future (the universal destiny which has appeared in Jesus), the Church is unique only to the extent that it bears testimony to the destination of all humankind in the kingdom of God.<sup>504</sup>

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498 Pannenberg, TKG, p.61.

499 Pannenberg, JGM, p.272.

500 Pannenberg, AC, p.126.

501 Pannenberg, JGM, p.196.

502 Pannenberg, AC, p.158.

503 Wolfhart Pannenberg, et. al., SPIRIT, FAITH AND CHURCH (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970), p.114. (hereafter cited as Pannenberg, SFC).

504 Wolfhart Pannenberg, HUMAN NATURE, ELECTION AND HISTORY (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), p.99. (hereafter cited as Pannenberg, HNEH).

That is to say, for Pannenberg the Church is distinct from the world in a functional but not an ontological way. Ontologically, Church and world are in no way separate, for they come from and move toward the same future. As the unifying power of wholeness, the future knits together into one being all humanity. The Church, however, has an important role to play functionally. It is 'an eschatological community pioneering the future of all mankind.'<sup>505</sup> By faith<sup>506</sup> it lives toward the coming Kingdom of God, demonstrating in its life and witness the provisionality of the time in which we live. As the People of God, Christians are elected to serve the purpose of God: 'they are chosen to exemplify the gracious intentions of God's love for all human beings.'<sup>507</sup> The Church is true to this vocation 'only as it anticipates and represents the destiny of all mankind, the goal of history.'<sup>508</sup>

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505 Pannenberg, TKG, p.75.

506 Much of the present dialogue with Pannenberg concerns his understanding of faith. It is beyond the scope of 'this chapter to enter fully into the debate, except to point out that for him faith is an orientation of trust toward the future. Pannenberg believes that faith must be grounded upon certain historical events that are open to rational investigation. However, that does not mean he has totally compressed faith into reason. He distinguishes between knowledge and trust, faith needing both. On the basis of knowledge, a person must entrust himself fully to the object of his knowledge, and in Christian faith, that means the God of the future. See AC, pp.3-12; BQT, 1:65; 2:28-43; FAITH AND REALITY, pp.66-67; THEOLOGY AS HISTORY, pp.221-76; and cf. Martin J. Buss, 'The Meaning of History,' in THEOLOGY AS HISTORY, pp.135-54 (esp. 154); Daniel P. Fuller, 'A New German Theological Movement,' SCOTTISH JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY 19 (1966): pp.170-71; Galloway, WOLFHART PANNENBERG, pp.52-53, Helmut G. Harder & W. Taylor Stevenson, 'The Continuity of History and Faith in the Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg: Toward an Erotics of History,' THE JOURNAL OF RELIGION 51 (1971): 24-56 (esp. 51-52).

507 Pannenberg, HNEH, p.108.

508 Pannenberg, TKG, p.75.

Though the Church is a 'precursory form' of the kingdom, it is not the whole of the kingdom.<sup>509</sup> Thus Pannenberg is very careful to distinguish between the two:

The kingdom of God is not the church; it is the future of the church, as it is the future of all mankind. But the church is the community of those who already wait for the kingdom of God for Jesus' sake and live for this expectation. 510

The Church's waiting and living in expectation fulfils two important functions: it forces the political institutions realistically to admit their preliminary character as it demythologizes the political myths of a given time and, to use Pannenberg's image, sobers up those who have become drunk with power<sup>511</sup>; and it grants 'individuals access to the wholeness of life in the presence of the eternal,'<sup>512</sup> by confronting persons with the ultimate mystery of life, with the God of the future and his purposes in history.<sup>513</sup>

Since Pannenberg consistently views the Church from the perspective of its functional purposes, he refuses to ascribe eternity to it, seeing it rather as a temporary necessity.<sup>514</sup> Given the provisional nature of the present world, a separate religious institution is needed because the destiny of humanity is not yet realized in the general life of society. 'The function of the Church, put quite simply, is a preliminary function.'<sup>515</sup>

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509 Pannenberg, JGM, p.373.

510 Pannenberg, AC, p.155.

511 Pannenberg, TKG, p.85.

512 Ibid., p.90.

513 Ibid., p.91.

514 Ibid., p.83.

515 Ibid., p.82.

The existence of the Church is justified only because

the present political forms of society do not yet provide the ultimate human satisfaction for individual or corporate life. If the present social structures were adequate, there would be no need for the Church. For then the Kingdom would be present in its completeness. 516

Thus the Church cannot be understood as an end in itself.<sup>517</sup>

Its existence is justified only by the service it renders as a concrete symbol<sup>518</sup> which makes possible life in the secular world,

for without the Church, secular institutions would seek to sacralize and absolutize themselves to positions of tyranny over humankind.<sup>519</sup> The Church exists as a reminder of the provisionality of all things before the end; but when the end comes, the Church will lose its *raison d'être* and therefore cease to exist.

That is why, according to Pannenberg, the new Jerusalem will have 'no further need of any special religious institutions or temple (Rev. 21:22). Then all life will be carried on in the direct presence of God.'<sup>520</sup> But is this not a very weak biblical justification for the notion of the transitory nature of the Church? True enough, there will be no need for the temple (a localized place of worship), but what is the new Jerusalem itself? Who are its inhabitants? In context, is it not clear that the citizens of this city are together the Bride who has made herself ready for the marriage

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516 Ibid.

517 Pannenberg, SFC, p.119.

518 Pannenberg, HNEH, pp.32-33.

519 Pannenberg, TKG, pp.92-93.

520 Pannenberg, AC, p.157.

of the Lamb, having been clothed in the fine linen of the righteous deeds of the saints and the robes made white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-8; 7:14)?<sup>521</sup> And does not the great multitude pour forth its Hallelujahs like the sound of mighty thunderpeals because this Bride is corporately those who have endured the great tribulation and have come out of the Babylon 'thrown down with violence' so that she is 'found no more' (Rev. 18:4, 21)? Clearly Babylon and the Bride do not have the same future as it is envisioned by John of the Apocalypse; yet is not that precisely what Pannenberg envisions - a common future from which both somehow emerge and to which they return? How different the imagery of Scripture! Here the wholeness comes only after a great disruption which is itself part of the end; the joyous music of marriage only after the mournful lament of Babylon.<sup>522</sup>

By presupposing a wholeness created by an all-encompassing future, Pannenberg has offered us a not unattractive vision of reality that has a symmetrical neatness to it; however, one is left with the feeling that he has overstepped the bounds of knowledge witnessed to by Scripture, and in so doing has failed adequately to account for the disunity that is not only our present experience of

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521 Cf. Ephesians 5:32.

522 For a more complete analysis of the biblical material regarding universalism, judgment, and the Church, see Chapter VI of this thesis.

broken sinfulness, but is, in a way beyond our comprehension, an instrument of healing in the eschaton itself, where somehow unity includes division, wholeness brokenness, and salvation judgment.

Perhaps Dante was correct after all:

Madness! that reason lodged in human heads  
Should hope to traverse backward and unweave  
The infinite path Three-personed Substance treads.



## CHAPTER IV

## THE LOSS OF DISTINCTION FROM THE END:

PROMISE AND FULFILMENT IN THE  
THEOLOGY OF JÜRGEN MOLTSMANN

' . . . I don't know what will happen to me now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter to me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. I won't mind.

Like anybody else, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And he's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over, and I've seen the Promised Land.

I may not get there with you, but I want you to know that we as a people will get to the Promised Land.

So I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord. . . . ' 523

So spoke Martin Luther King, Jr. to a crowd of two thousand gathered at the Clayborn Temple in Memphis, Tennessee. The next afternoon he was shot dead. An assassin's bullet lethally ripped into the body of this modern Moses who had sought to lead his people to the 'Promised Land.' Though with his people oppressed by injustice, his commitment to God's will found expression through resistance to the status quo - a venture set free by a vision of the faint light already breaking on the horizon of a new day.

Jürgen Moltmann, in a vastly different setting and using language far removed from the lilting cadences of southern Black preaching, has expressed in a systematic way the theology inherent in King's

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523 Martin Luther King, Jr., as quoted by Coretta Scott King, MY LIFE WITH MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. (London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., 1969), p.328.

moving testimony on the eve of his death. He has written a theology which aims to have its eyes fully open to 'the glory of the coming of the Lord.' There is only one real problem in Christian theology, according to Moltmann: 'the problem of the future.'<sup>524</sup> This is so because

Christianity is eschatology . . . . The eschatological is not one element of Christianity, but it is the medium of Christian faith as such, the key in which everything is set, the glow that suffuses everything here in the dawn of an expected new day. 525

Thus Moltmann, like Pannenberg, is an 'eschatological theologian' - but with significant differences. In the last chapter, we saw that while Pannenberg speaks much about the future, he does so by way of re-defining it as the beginning. With a concern for wholeness as his starting-point, he views the future as the creative power of all reality, and reality, in turn, is moving towards its source. Pannenberg's theological construct, therefore, has an all-encompassing wholeness to it, like a closed circle: the end is really the beginning of all things which are moving towards the end which is really the beginning . . .

In sharp contrast to this closed circle, Moltmann's theology looks linearly toward an open-ended future. The Easter appearances of the Crucified Christ, Moltmann tells us, have opened the eschatological horizon and set history moving toward the future of the coming Lord.

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524 Jürgen Moltmann, THEOLOGY OF HOPE - ON THE GROUND AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF A CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGY, trans. James W. Leitch (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1967), p.16 (hereafter cited as TH).

525 Ibid., p.16.

Thus, if in the Middle Ages Anselm of Canterbury set down the basic theological principle, fides quaerens intellectum - credo, ut intelligam, today it is of decisive importance for Christian theology to follow this basic principle: spes quaerens intellectum - spero, ut intelligam.<sup>526</sup>

What is necessary, then, is a 'theology of hope.'

Faith binds man to Christ. Hope sets this faith open to the comprehensive future of Christ. Hope is therefore the 'inseparable companion' of faith . . . . Without faith's knowledge of Christ, hope becomes a utopia and remains hanging in the air. But without hope, faith falls to pieces, becomes a faint-hearted and ultimately dead faith. 527

Biblical hope is not an escapist diversion from the pains of the present. Because of the Christ event, it stands on the mountaintop, as it were, and looks over into a Promised Land that contradicts present reality. Those conscripted into the army of hope suffer under present reality as if in an alien land. 'Peace with God means conflict with the world, for the goad of the promised future stabs inexorably into the flesh of every unfulfilled present.'<sup>528</sup>

But then, does hope rob humanity of the happiness of the present? Quite the contrary, Moltmann answers, for hope 'is itself the happiness of the present.'<sup>529</sup> Hope unleashes the power of expectation which

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526 Ibid., p.33.

527 Ibid., p.20.

528 Ibid., p.21.

529 Ibid., p.32.

enables a person to accept the whole of life - joy and sorrow - because 'in the promises of God he can see a future also for the transient, the dying and the dead.'<sup>530</sup> Without hope there is no real life. 'Hell is hopelessness, and it is not for nothing that at the entrance to Dante's hell there stand the words: "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here."<sup>531</sup>

The theology of hope gladly announces that the gates of this hell have been thoroughly ravaged by the promises of God - especially the promise of God, Jesus Christ. Moltmann thus outlines a theology of promise, for it is promise that vitalizes hope. Each of his three major books analyzes one aspect of promise: THEOLOGY OF HOPE inquires into the logic of promise as a revelatory event; THE CRUCIFIED GOD<sup>532</sup> looks to the cross of the risen Christ as the key to the content of promise; THE CHURCH IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT<sup>533</sup> seeks an understanding of the people of promise. The remainder of this chapter will consider successively each of these three components of Moltmann's theology.

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530 Ibid.

531 Ibid.

532 Jürgen Moltmann, THE CRUCIFIED GOD - THE CROSS OF CHRIST AS THE FOUNDATION AND CRITICISM OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY, trans. R. A. Wilson & John Bowden (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1974) (hereafter cited as CG).

533 Jürgen Moltmann, THE CHURCH IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT - A CONTRIBUTION TO MESSIANIC ECCLESIOLOGY, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1977) (hereafter cited as CPS).

### A. The Logic Of Promise

The discovery, at the end of the nineteenth century, of the eschatological background and content of Jesus' life and ministry, which owes its beginning to Albert Schweitzer and Johannes Weiss, is appreciated today as one of the most important exegetical advancements in modern Protestant theology. However, Moltmann maintains that Schweitzer and Weiss unfortunately retreated back into traditional liberalism. Because the end did not come as Jesus expected, the eschatological element was depreciated.<sup>534</sup>

After World War I, the founders of 'dialectical theology,' led by Karl Barth, once again took up the eschatological, dusted off the condemnations heaped on it for its ineffectiveness, and put it at the centre of not only exegetical but also dogmatic study. Nevertheless, it was not really set free to transform theology, according to Moltmann. Though Barth announced that Christianity must be 'unreservedly eschatological,' he imprisoned it in the shackles of transcendentalism. 'It was precisely the transcendentalist view of eschatology that prevented the break-through of eschatological dimensions in dogmatics.'<sup>535</sup> Moltmann's THEOLOGY OF HOPE is essentially a determined effort to set the prisoner free, to deliver eschatology from the bondage of contradictory presuppositions. Once liberated, the eschatological becomes not just one part of theological study, usually trailing in the wake of other doctrinal formulations, but the determining conceptual framework for all theological study. If the eschatological is truly central

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534 Moltmann, TH, pp.37-38.

535 Ibid., p.40.

to the message and mission of Jesus, as Moltmann believes it is, then eschatology is not simply one subject for study among others, but the entire process of theological study itself must submit to the unique nature of this subject.

Moltmann sets out to accomplish what Barth intended but for various reasons was unable to accomplish, namely, the goal of drawing all Christian theology out of its own peculiar subject matter and thus making it eschatological and therefore dialectical. 536

What does Moltmann mean by 'transcendental eschatology'?

By this term he means those theologies which answer the question of the future and goal of revelation by means of a reflection: 'the wherefore and the whence are the same, the goal of revelation is identical with its source.'<sup>537</sup> Barth is guilty of this because for him God reveals only himself, and thus 'the goal and the future of revelation lies in himself.'<sup>538</sup> Similarly, Bultmann is guilty of a transcendentalism of the human self so that the goal of revelation 'is that man should attain to his authenticity and primordially, that is, to himself.'<sup>539</sup> The result of either approach to revelation is that revelation and the eschaton coincide - in the former instance, in God, and in the latter, in the human self.

Revelation does not then open up a future in terms of promise, nor does it have any future that would be greater than itself, but revelation of God is then the coming of the eternal to man or the coming of man to himself. It is precisely this reflection on the transcendent 'self' that makes eschatology a transcendental eschatology. 'Revelation'

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536 M. Douglas Meeks, ORIGINS OF THE THEOLOGY OF HOPE (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), p.19. See also pp.59-61.

537 Moltmann, TH, p.46.

538 Ibid.

539 Ibid.

becomes the apocalypse of the transcendent  
subjectivity of God or of man. 540

In either case, reality is de-historicized and humanity is robbed of a genuine future. With Barth, it is almost impossible to speak of an outstanding future of Christ, but only of a noetic unveiling of what has already been accomplished and revealed in him. Over against this, Moltmann contends that eschatology is not simply a summing up or a disclosure of an accomplished fact, but it speaks of a reality that is not yet, a hope for something yet to be reconciled, a waiting for a genuinely 'new thing.' And on the other hand, because 'Bultmann and his school had baptized eschatology in the waters of existentialism,'<sup>541</sup> history was swallowed up in the personal decision of faith. For if a person comes 'to himself,' attains final authenticity in faith, then faith itself is the practical end of history, since through it the believer attains his perfected selfhood. Hence 'there would be nothing more that still awaits him, and nothing more towards which he is on his way in the world in the body and in history. . .'<sup>542</sup> Thus, 'eschatology for both Barth and Bultmann is turned into the 'epiphany of the eternal present.'<sup>543</sup>

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540 Ibid.

541 Gabriel Fackre, THE RAINBOW SIGN - CHRISTIAN FUTURITY,  
New Reformation Series (London: Epworth Press, 1969), p.4.

542 Moltmann, TH, p.68.

543 Ibid. It is questionable, in my judgment, whether Moltmann has really come to terms with the full scope of Barth's eschatology, especially its later development in CD IV/3. Cf. Chapter VI of this thesis.

Though Moltmann is critical of the de-historicizing of the eschatological in dialectical theology, he is equally unwilling to accept the complete historicizing of revelation that one finds in Pannenberg. To hold a view of 'revelation as history' fails to comprehend adequately the present significance of the cross, he contends. If we look to the future of the crucified Lord, then 'theology must accept the "cross of the present" (Hegel), its godlessness and godforsakenness.'<sup>544</sup> The eschaton is not simply a clearer interpretation of present reality; rather, it stands over against history as we know it. The future opened up through Christ's resurrection is not just an apocalyptic unveiling of universal history, but breaks the bounds of Jewish apocalypticism.<sup>545</sup> The resurrection is not merely the first instance of a universal end, but turns the eyes of faith to the new future of the Lord himself who is coming, and therefore is given a world-transforming outlook.<sup>546</sup>

Over against these exclusive definitions of revelation, as Word (Barth and Bultmann) or as history (Pannenberg), Moltmann developed a concept of revelation as Word-history . . . . This third, reconciling view was "promissory history."<sup>547</sup> The Word of God is history-making because it is given in the form of promise - a Word which opens up

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544 Ibid., p.84.

545 Ibid., pp.192-93.

546 Ibid., pp.82-83. Cf. also Moltmann's rejection of 'salvation history' in which 'revelation became a predicate of history, and "history" was turned deistically into a substitute for God' (TH, p.71).

547 Meeks, ORIGINS OF THE THEOLOGY OF HOPE, p.65.



the future and sets its hearer on the way. Not in the logos of the epiphany of the eternal present, but in the hope-giving word of promise did Israel find God's truth. 'Christian eschatology in the language of promise will then be an essential key to the unlocking of Christian truth.'<sup>548</sup>

For Moltmann, the essential thing to be understood about 'promise' is that it

announces the coming of a not yet existing reality from the future of the truth . . . .  
It does not illuminate a future which is always somehow already inherent in reality. Rather, 'future' is that reality which fulfils and satisfies the promise because it completely corresponds to it. 549

We should note three important implications of this definition: first, promise contradicts existing reality<sup>550</sup> - a fact that has great importance for Moltmann as his theology develops; second, if revelation is promise, then it must be understood as open-ended, pointing and leading forward beyond itself;<sup>551</sup> third, promise refers to something new, a creative act that will accomplish something that is not yet.<sup>552</sup> Thus, promise establishes an 'interval of tension' between

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548 Moltmann, TH, p.41. For a concise summary of what Moltmann means by 'promise' and its various consequences, see TH, pp.102-6.

549 Ibid., p.85.

550 Ibid., p.86.

551 Ibid., p.88. Thus Moltmann speaks about 'the questionableness of human existence and the questionableness of reality as a whole' (TH, p.94).

552 Ibid., p.88, 92. 227. 'What, then, does the future of Christ bring? Not a mere repetition of his history [contra Pannenberg], and not only an unveiling of it [contra Barth], but something which has so far not yet happened through Christ' (TH, 228-29).

present and promised reality. This has a historicizing effect as humanity is set on its way toward a goal<sup>553</sup> and given the opportunity in the interval to obey or disobey.<sup>554</sup> The question as to how one should live in the in-between time now becomes urgent. The answer is given in the form of commandment. 'Promise and command, the pointing of the goal and the pointing of the way, therefore, belong immediately together.'<sup>555</sup>

The word of promise, according to Moltmann, is the golden thread linking together the various narratives of the biblical witness. It was promise that set Abraham on his way to a new land. It was promise that kept Israel moving through the wilderness. It was promise, contradicting present reality, open-ended and anticipating the new, that caused Israel constantly to look beyond into a coming future. It was promise that marked off Israelite worship from that of its neighbours as it maintained a cultic practice informed by the life of sojourning - even when it had settled in the land. Whereas the religions around them hallowed places, times, and persons, because of their association with the divine 'appearing,' and so found order in their lives through contact with the eternal cosmos, Israel, in striking contrast, understood the 'appearing' of God in terms of the uttering of the word of promise. The reason for the

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553 Ibid., pp.100, 103.

554 Ibid., p.104.

555 Ibid., p.120. Thus commandments are 'as little rigid norms as the promises,' but are the 'ethical side of the promise' (TH, p.122).

appearances, then, was to point beyond themselves into an as yet unrealized future.<sup>556</sup> Even on Israel's political deathbed, instead of weakening in power, the promise is universalized and intensified as all the nations are brought into the hands of God and his future.<sup>557</sup>

The moving horizon of the assurances for the future given by the God of promise, once it is extended to embrace 'all peoples,' then reaches the utmost bounds of human reality as such, and becomes universal and so also eschatological. 558

Once the promise becomes eschatological, it is quite likely, Moltmann thinks, that apocalyptic cosmology became eschatologized, so that apocalyptic literature represents not a cosmological interpretation of eschatological history, but the reverse, 'an eschatological and historic interpretation of the cosmos.'<sup>559</sup> The promise, as it were, breaks the bounds of the cosmos and takes the cosmos itself up into its history.

The vision of hope one finds in late Jewish apocalyptic concerning the resurrection of the dead has to do with the question of theodicy: 'When will God's righteousness triumph over this world of evil and pain? When will God show himself in his divinity and fulfil his promise?'<sup>560</sup>

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556 Ibid., pp.99-100.

557 Ibid., p.129.

558 Ibid.

559 Ibid., p.136.

560 Jürgen Moltmann, RELIGION, REVOLUTION, AND THE FUTURE, trans. M. Douglas Meeks (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p.45.

It is in this context - the word of promise and its consequent history - that the gospel must be understood. Jesus' Father was Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God who promised. As a Jew, Jesus stands in the community and history of promise; therefore only against this background can his life and ministry be properly known. 'The gospel is promise and as promise it is an earnest of the promised future.'<sup>561</sup>

The event of the promissory gospel is the resurrection and appearances of Jesus Christ. 'If it is this Old Testament God of promise who acts and reveals himself in the event of the resurrection, then this revelatory event must also be understood in terms of promise and fulfilment.'<sup>562</sup> Neither historicism, which approaches the resurrection as if it simply took place in history and somehow corresponds analogously to other events which provide the key to its interpretation,<sup>563</sup> nor existentialism, which never gets beyond the question how the Church preached to the question why it spoke,<sup>564</sup> is adequate for understanding the full significance of the raising of Christ from the dead.

Beyond both historicism and existentialism stands the attempt to find the ground of historic phenomena neither in a positivistic system of laws nor in the historic character of human existence, but to see them in their significance for the future. 565

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561 Moltmann, TH, p.148.

562 Meeks, ORIGINS OF THE THEOLOGY OF HOPE, p.73.

563 Moltmann, TH, pp.180-81.

564 Ibid., p.188.

565 Ibid., pp.189-90.

This means that 'the event of the raising of Christ from the dead is an event which is understood only in the modus of promise.'<sup>566</sup> The resurrection is 'historic' because it is history-making, i.e., in a promissory way it points the way to future events, 'it discloses an eschatological future.'<sup>567</sup>

What constitutes the horizon of history and what is to be expected of this history set in motion by the eschatological promise of the raising of the one who was crucified, is outlined by the inner tendency and the intention of God revealed in this event. What Christian eschatology discerns by this is nothing less than Christ's future lordship over all creation and over every enemy, including death.<sup>568</sup> To be sure, the future is only delineated in a provisional way. The resurrection is not fulfilment, but promise; hence, it provides a fragmentary knowledge, straining beyond itself to an open future and a new creative act.<sup>569</sup> Nevertheless, Moltmann believes that the tendency of things latent in the resurrection of Jesus and the intended goal toward which they point are recognizable to a degree. What is seen in the event is the future lordship of Christ, the kingdom of God.

If the apocalyptic hope for the resurrection of the dead raised the question of theodicy, the eschatological event of Christ's resurrection gave the answer. God's righteousness, by which all things will

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566 Ibid.

567 Ibid., p.180-81.

568 Ibid., pp.194, 226-27.

569 Ibid., p.203.

be reconciled (persons will be set right with themselves, with their fellows and the whole creation), will triumph in the future of Jesus Christ. Therefore, with the resurrection we have to do with a universal, all-inclusive eschatological event that promises all reality a future new being.<sup>570</sup> The inner necessity of the Christ event is 'to bring out in all things the eternal life latent in him and the justice of God latent in him.'<sup>571</sup> Thus, the promise of the coming reign of God in Christ is universal - all things will attain 'to right, to life, to peace, to freedom, and to truth.'<sup>572</sup>

If the kingdom of God begins as it were with a new act of creation, then the Reconciler is ultimately the Creator, and thus the eschatological prospect of reconciliation must mean the reconciliation of the whole creation, and must develop an eschatology of all things. 573

From the foregoing it may seem that Moltmann is guilty of the accusation he makes against Pannenberg: a one-sided emphasis on the resurrection. Such is not the case. He recognizes that 'the divine righteousness has its ground both in the event of the cross and in that of the resurrection, that is, both in his death and in his life.'<sup>574</sup> It is the crucified one who was raised from the dead. That means for Moltmann that God's revelation in Christ is constituted in the form of a dialectic - an open dialectic - which will only finally be resolved in the eschaton.<sup>575</sup> For the present, the dialectic

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570 Ibid., p.204.

571 Ibid., p.216.

572 Ibid., p.224.

573 Ibid., p.223.

574 Ibid., p.205.

575 Meeks, ORIGINS OF THE THEOLOGY OF HOPE, p.79.

means that because Jesus has been raised from the dead the kingdom of God can be nothing less than a new creation; and since the risen Lord is the crucified Christ, the coming

lordship of God takes shape here in the suffering of the Christians, who because of their hope cannot be conformed to the world, but are drawn by the mission and love of Christ into discipleship and conformity to his sufferings. 576

This theme has been more fully amplified by Moltmann as his theology has developed, as will be evident in our discussion of THE CRUCIFIED GOD and THE CHURCH IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT. Yet, even in THEOLOGY OF HOPE, which puts the emphasis on the resurrection, there is a recognition of the cross and its necessary relationship to the raising of Christ.

The question, however, is whether Moltmann's 'dialectic' of cross and resurrection is really a dialectic or merely a contradiction; that is to say, does Moltmann, in THEOLOGY OF HOPE, adequately account for the dialectic of cross and resurrection, or does he, using those labels, really set up a contradiction between this age and the age to come? It appears that Moltmann at this stage in his thought, has not really come to terms with the presence of the risen Lord in the cross and the future of the crucified Lord in the eschaton - the present and future dialectic between cross and resurrection in which each mutually interprets and is informed by the other.<sup>577</sup> Rather, Moltmann temporalizes,

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576 Moltmann, TH, p.222.

577 Later, in THE CRUCIFIED GOD and THE CHURCH IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT, Moltmann does deal with this dialectic. The present criticism applies only to the earlier stage of his thought reflected in THEOLOGY OF HOPE.

so to speak, the cross and resurrection, so that they stand for two completely contradictory periods. In a way similar to Hegel's 'speculative Good Friday' and Bonhoeffer's 'world come of age,' Moltmann uses the cross as an interpretative principle of present experience.

In the cross we recognise the god-forsakenness of all things, and with the cross we can recognize the real absence of the kingdom of God in which all things attain to righteousness and peace. 578

The resurrection, on the other hand, is not the in-breaking of the eschaton but a promise directed toward it. The resurrection points beyond itself, becoming the symbol of the coming kingdom that stands in contradiction to the present godlessness of this age. The kingdom of God is here present only as promise and hope, and therefore

if it is present as promise and hope, then this its presence is determined by the contradiction in which the future, the possible and the promised stands to a corrupted reality. 579

And since all reality stands under the sign of the cross, the sign of the resurrection promises the future restoration of all things through new creation, 'and hope in the kingdom can be satisfied with no less than this.'<sup>580</sup>

It is difficult to understand how, in Moltmann's thought, the future will bring to reconciliation the dialectic between the cross and resurrection; rather, it seems that the future itself is the other side of the great contradiction between ages. Instead of achieving

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578 Moltmann, TH, p.223.

579 Ibid.

580 Ibid.



a reconciliation between two presently dialectical elements, Moltmann is really looking for a complete transition from the age of the cross to the age of the resurrection; that is, transformation not reconciliation.

By beginning with the premise that revelation is promise, and that means an open-ended, fragmentary, present-reality-contradicting event that points beyond itself to something completely new, Moltmann finds himself in a situation in which the revelatory event of the gospel must be devalued as an event in itself and seen as a pointer to the coming future. The resurrection for Moltmann is promise, but according to his definition of promise that means it must contradict present reality; thus his sharp disjunction between the cross and the resurrection, the present and the future, the godforsakenness of the present and the universal salvation of the future.<sup>581</sup>

But is the kingdom of God, in fact, wholly outstanding? This is the critical question that must be raised against Moltmann's THEOLOGY OF HOPE. Is there not a sense in which the kingdom is present, not in fulfilment of course, but concretely present nonetheless? Christ's resurrection may indeed be promise, but what gives it its eschatological

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581 In a private conversation with me, Moltmann agreed with my criticism of his complete disjunction between this age and the eschaton in THEOLOGY OF HOPE. The eschaton is concretely present, he now believes, in the crucified Christ and the gifts of the Spirit. This change in his thinking is evident in his later works. When I asked him if he believed he had changed his position, he replied, 'Of course, I'm no stone!' With that admirable affirmation of flexibility in the pursuit of theological truth, the conversation ended.

scope if not the fact that the new creation has indeed broken in upon this present age? According to the synoptics, Jesus proclaimed a kingdom that was both future and present.<sup>582</sup> He taught his disciples to pray 'thy kingdom come' (Matt. 6:10), yet he also announced that 'the kingdom of God is in the midst of you' (Lk. 17:21). And is not the Spirit the present 'seal' and 'guarantee' of our inheritance (I Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13-14) - the Spirit who concretely manifests the Lord's presence in the experience of the Church through the charismata (I Cor. 12:4-11)? In Moltmann's theology

the Kingdom appears as an arc that reaches from the resurrection of Christ over history and cosmos to its touchdown point at the resurrection of the dead. A world so bereft of the 'thermal current' of eschatological grace at work in the present is difficult to square with the Christian drama. It is not only the promise of Christ that breaks in proleptically but his real presence and power; not just the 'whiff' of what is to come but an authentic foretaste. 583

Moltmann's complete dependence on the logic of promise has ill-served him at this stage in his thought. Apart from the biblical difficulties his theology is faced with, it has, in effect, knocked out all foundations from under itself. For if the kingdom is wholly outstanding and all present reality is godforsaken, then presumably Moltmann's theology itself (indeed, all theology) is godforsaken and bereft of the revealing light of the new day dawning in Christ. The only logical response to that situation would be to shut the books,

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582 Cf. footnote 53 in Chapter III.

583 Fackre, THE RAINBOW SIGN, p.75.

set down the pen, and keep an honest silence that suffers under the contradiction of the present.

One final aspect of THEOLOGY OF HOPE should be mentioned before we proceed to Moltmann's later works, for it is an idea he consistently maintains throughout his theological development. It is this: 'the Easter appearances of Christ are manifestly phenomena of vocation.'<sup>584</sup> Because the resurrection is a promise pointing to the coming future of Jesus Christ, a horizon has been opened to his followers and they are set on their way toward his future lordship. That means the resurrection creates mission. In fact, Moltmann takes that a step further, saying, in effect, mission creates the Church. The existence of the Church 'is completely bound to the fulfilling of its service. For this reason it is nothing in itself, but all that it is, it is in existing for others.'<sup>585</sup> Like Pannenberg, Moltmann adopts a completely functional concept of the Church. We shall examine this later, but notice: this idea, which he consistently follows, is a consequence of his logic of promise as developed in THEOLOGY OF HOPE. For if there is no present, concrete manifestation of the future in this present age, then it is impossible to understand the Church in any way other than only functionally different from the rest of the world. It has its 'existence' in the act of mission, to be sure, but 'if we would fathom its essence, then we must enquire into the future,

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584 Moltmann, TH, p.196.

585 Ibid., p.327.

on which it sets its hopes and expectations.'<sup>586</sup> What this means is that there is no essential difference between the Church and the world for Moltmann, for he clearly believes in a future universal restoration, as was shown above. Since the future of all things is the same (the future of Jesus Christ), and since 'essence' is defined by the future, then presumably the essence of all reality is identical. That leaves his theology with a Church whose uniqueness is defined wholly in terms of its functional activity, its mission. Though Moltmann later modifies his disjunction between the cross and resurrection, this age and the eschaton, he does not alter this aspect of it; his ecclesiology is consistently marked by functionalism.

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586 Ibid., p.325.

## B. The Content of Promise

From the resurrection of the crucified Christ, Moltmann turns his theological attention to the cross of the risen Christ in THE CRUCIFIED GOD. This is the appropriate sequence for considering the Christ event, according to Moltmann, because 'for Paul the "word of the cross" is based in the event of the resurrection of the crucified Christ.'<sup>587</sup>

It is important for the history of the primitive Christian tradition to realize that after the theology of the resurrection and the enthusiasm of the Spirit, faith once again returned and reached back to the earthly and crucified Jesus of Nazareth. Students of Paul have emphasized this astonishing fact and its significance. It was this which gave rise to the new literary category of a gospel, in the synoptic sense. 588

Thus, following Paul and the experience of the early Church, Moltmann enquires into the significance of the crucifixion of the one risen and confessed as Lord.<sup>589</sup>

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587 Moltmann, CG, p.73.

588 Ibid., p.74.

589 Moltmann wants to stay clear of both a Jesuology which is concerned solely with the earthly, historical Jesus, and a Christology concerned only about the Christ whom faith and the Church proclaim. Therefore, Moltmann considers the crucifixion from the perspectives of 'The Historical Trial of Jesus' (pp.112-53) and 'The Eschatological Trial of Jesus' (pp.160-196): 'We shall attempt to achieve an understanding of the crucified Christ, first of all in the light of his life and ministry, which led to his crucifixion, and then in the light of eschatological faith which proclaims his resurrection from the dead, and in so doing proclaims him as the Christ (CG, p.112). Unfortunately, we must dispense with a thorough analysis of his first goal, given the limitations of this chapter. If the bulk of the following discussion emphasizes the eschatological implications of the cross, it is because of its more direct relevance to the argument here presented, and, in my judgment, more of a piece with the fabric of his theology as a whole.

Now this order of approach - moving from the resurrection to the cross - is by no means arbitrary or simply reflective of historical experience. It is absolutely necessary, for the resurrection is the only door through which one gains access to the theological meaning of the cross. 'Christian faith essentially reads the history of Jesus back to front.'<sup>590</sup> The crucified Christ was understood in the light of the resurrection, and his resurrection was understood in the light of the eschaton. That means, therefore, his historical crucifixion was an eschatological event. 'The resurrection "does not evacuate the cross" (I Cor. 1:17), but fills it with eschatology and saving significance.'<sup>591</sup>

However, once one comes to the eschatological cross via the resurrection, one is immediately turned around and sent back to the resurrection and the coming glory; that is to say, 'his death on the cross expresses the significance of his resurrection for us'<sup>592</sup> and 'in the crucified Christ we view the future of God.'<sup>593</sup> Clearly, then, Moltmann has become more fully dialectical in THE CRUCIFIED GOD as he seeks to understand the inner relationship between the cross and the resurrection. Only through the resurrection can one understand the cross; yet, only through the cross can one understand the resurrection.

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590 Ibid., p.162.

591 Ibid., p.182.

592 Ibid.

593 Jürgen Moltmann, THE EXPERIMENT HOPE, ed. and trans. M. Douglas Meeks (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1975), p.57.

In what way does the cross illuminate for us the meaning of the resurrection?

By understanding Christ's death as having taken place 'for many,' one can understand his resurrection from the dead as having taken place in favour of those who are still dead. If that is the case, then his death on the cross 'for us' can be understood as a proof of his resurrection. To understand the representative significance of his death is to understand the resurrection. In His dying for us the risen Christ looks on us and draws us into his life. 594

In other words, the 'for us' nature of God's self-giving in Christ's death reveals the 'for us' nature of the resurrection. Whereas late Jewish apocalypticism expected a resurrection from the dead in order for God's righteousness to triumph in a final judgment, and hence was constantly threatened by the ambivalency of an uncertain verdict, Christian faith is set free from doubt about the future. It knows only an unequivocally joyful hope. 'It shows the cross of Christ as the unique and once-for-all anticipation of the great world judgment in favour of those who otherwise could not survive it.'<sup>595</sup> Through the cross, therefore, the future is opened to all - not just the righteous, but even the unrighteous. Since the cross shows that God takes the side of the unrighteous, the future of this God (promised in the resurrection) must be understood completely in terms of the grace this revealed. 'The coming glory of God is mirrored in the face of the crucified one.'<sup>596</sup> Thus, if the resurrection is an event of

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594 Moltmann, CG, p.186.

595 Ibid., p.176.

596 Moltmann, RELIGION, REVOLUTION AND THE FUTURE, p.53.

promise, the cross outlines more specifically the content of this promise. If the resurrection is the event of promise that sets us off on a journey through the wilderness of this life, the cross is Mt. Nebo, elevating us high enough to look beyond the Jordan into the land flowing with the milk and honey of God's grace.

How is it the cross reveals the grace of God? What is there in the scandalous fact that the risen Christ is the same as the condemned, forsaken, executed Jesus of Nazareth that discloses the 'for us' of the gospel? This question cannot be answered, according to Moltmann, by referring to the concept of 'expiation.' This is because

the early Jewish-Christian idea of the dying Christ as an expiatory offering for our sins, which has constantly been repeated throughout the traditions in varied forms, cannot display any intrinsic theological connection with the kerygma of the resurrection. 597

Moltmann is not unaware of the biblical traditions that support the notion of expiation (e.g., the sacrificial cult of the Jerusalem temple, the concept of the special expiatory power of the 'blood of Jesus' that one finds in Romans 3:25 and I Corinthians 10:16, etc.),<sup>598</sup> but he feels constrained to reject them because 'it is very difficult to harmonize the resurrection of Jesus with these interpretations of death.'<sup>599</sup> We should clarify this: it is very difficult to harmonize

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597 Moltmann, CG, p.183.

598 Ibid.

599 Ibid. One may well ask whether it is legitimate for Moltmann to dispense with a view so broadly supported in Scripture because it does not 'harmonize' with his theology of the resurrection. Is it possible that his understanding of the resurrection needs to be modified to give a more full accounting of the biblical witness?



Moltmann's view of the resurrection of Jesus with these interpretations of his death. As was shown above, he sees the raising of Christ as an event of promise pointing forward to the future. True, it casts a light on the cross, but that light is immediately reflected back upon the resurrection - indeed beyond, to the eschaton - revealing more clearly the nature of the promise. The cross, then, is as forward-looking as the resurrection: it brings into sharper focus the future promised by the event of the resurrection. Now the problem Moltmann has with the idea of expiation is that it exists within the framework of the law. Through sin a person falls short of the righteousness of the law and comes under its condemnation; 'by expiation he is restored to the righteousness of the law. Expiation for sins has a retrospective character. Its concern is the restitutio in integrum, not the beginning of a new life.'<sup>600</sup> Consequently, Moltmann rules out expiatory notions - not on exegetical grounds, but because they are not prospective in character, i.e., they do not seem to conform to the forward-looking, promissory structure of God's ways with humanity.

In what way, then, do we understand the cross as an event of God's gracious salvation? For Moltmann, the cross reveals the panentheistic nature of reality. To explain this, we must first emphasize Moltmann's concern to penetrate the trinitarian implications of the cross. The title of his book indicates this: THE CRUCIFIED GOD. In the suffering of Jesus God himself suffered and died for us; we properly speak of the

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600 Ibid.

crucifixion of God.<sup>601</sup> However, this fact must be kept in its trinitarian context. 'Jesus' death cannot be understood "as the death of God," but only as death in God.'<sup>602</sup> The Son of God died in abandonment and godforsakenness - he enters into the godlessness of sin for our sake. And in that act, the Father suffers too, for he, according to Paul, 'delivered up' his Son, handed him over to abandonment for the sake of humanity.<sup>603</sup> 'In the cross, Father and Son are most deeply separated in forsakenness, and at the same time are most inwardly one in their surrender.'<sup>604</sup> In the Father's delivering up of his Son, and in the Son's abandonment by the Father, God suffered by identifying himself fully with the brokenness of sin. Thus Moltmann can say:

God overcomes himself, God passes judgment on himself, God takes the judgment on the sin of man upon himself. He assigns to himself the fate that we should by rights endure. 605

Moltmann does not mean by this to stress a judicial, penal atonement in the sense that God's injured holiness found satisfaction through the death of Christ. Rather, he seems to be articulating a theology of salvation by identification and absorption. In Christ, God identified fully with humanity living in the consequences of its sin:

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601 Ibid., p.192.

602 Ibid., p.207.

603 Ibid., p.242.

604 Ibid., p.244.

605 Ibid., p.193.

he entered completely into the godlessness and suffering of sin. In so doing, he took it upon himself - as if to say, he absorbed all sin and its awful consequences into his being. This means that now God and suffering are no longer contradictions, but 'God's being is in suffering and all the suffering is in God's being itself.'<sup>606</sup>

The content of the doctrine of the Trinity is the real cross of Christ himself. The form of the Crucified Christ is the Trinity. In that case, what is salvation? Only if all disaster, forsakenness by God, absolute death, the infinite curse of damnation and sinking into nothingness is in God himself, is community with this God eternal salvation, infinite joy, indestructable election and divine life. The 'bifurcation' in God must contain the whole uproar of history within itself . . . . If one describes the life of God within the Trinity as the 'history of God' (Hegel), this history of God contains within itself the whole abyss of godforsakenness, absolute death and the non-God . . . . All human history, however much it may be determined by guilt and death, is taken up into this 'history of God,' i.e., into the Trinity, and integrated into the future of the 'history of God.' 607

By virtue of the death of Christ, all reality is taken up into God and made a participant in the eschatological life of God.<sup>608</sup>

Panentheism thus leads to universalism:

. . . the theology of the cross is the true Christian universalism. There is no distinction here, and there cannot be any more distinctions. All are sinners without distinction, and all will be made righteous without any merit on their part by his grace which has come to pass on Christ Jesus (Rom. 3:24). 609

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606 Ibid., p.227.

607 Ibid., p.246.

608 Ibid., p.255. Thus Moltmann asserts that 'even Auschwitz is in God himself' (CG, p.278).

609 Ibid., p.195.

Because the cross shows us that all things have been taken up into God - even sin and death - it reveals the universal scope of the promise given in the resurrection. Though our knowledge of the eschaton is only anticipatory, this much is certain for Moltmann: It will bring universal participation in the life of God.

It should be obvious that Moltmann, in THE CRUCIFIED GOD, does seek to be more fully dialectical in his understanding of the cross and resurrection. The cross is visible only in the light of the resurrection, he tells us, and conversely, the meaning of the resurrection is revealed through the event of the cross. However, it is still questionable whether Moltmann's theology really hopes for a reconciliation of this dialectic in the eschaton. If he seems to have a contradiction between ages in THEOLOGY OF HOPE, with a transformation from one age to the next, but no real reconciliation, then it appears that in THE CRUCIFIED GOD he locates the reconciliation in God himself, not in the future eschaton. At the cross, Moltmann asserts, God has taken all evil into himself, and therefore grants all reality a share in his eschatological life.

In THEOLOGY OF HOPE, Moltmann is constrained by his a priori definition of 'promise' (that which contradicts present reality) to adopt a contradictory structure of reality with this age and the age to come as polar opposites. Since this age stands under the godlessness of the cross, the promise of the resurrection points toward the restoration of all things in a new creation. In THE CRUCIFIED GOD, as Moltmann sought to penetrate more deeply the trinitarian implications of the cross, he maintained, to a certain extent, the category of promise

as the mode of revelation, as is seen in his rejection of the idea of expiation because of its supposed backward reference to the law and its restoration. Since the cross is understood in light of a promissory event, and because it in turn outlines more clearly the character of the promise, it must itself be an event of promise - or at least forward-looking, and not retrospective. Wherein is its salvation for humanity? In the fact that it is an event that takes place within the trinitarian history of God, by which God takes all reality in its broken sinfulness up into himself in order to grant to all reality an inheritance in his eternal life. Moltmann's original structure of promise and fulfilment, with this age and the age to come standing in strict contradiction, has been considerably altered. Now he sees 'inherent in the Christ event a real incarnation of God's future.'<sup>610</sup> The cross is the 'historical mediation of God's future':<sup>611</sup> the salvation of the future is concretely present in the crucifixion of Jesus. This position more adequately accounts for the Scriptural witness to the present reality of the kingdom (later, in THE CHURCH IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT, Moltmann continues to explore the kingdom's presence in the manifestations of the Holy Spirit), but in moving away from the ruling category of promise, Moltmann seems to proceed toward a position in which God's being itself is understood as the event of reconciliation, and toward

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610 Moltmann, RELIGION, REVOLUTION AND THE FUTURE, p.213.

611 Meeks, ORIGINS OF THE THEOLOGY OF HOPE, p.124.

the corollary idea of the panentheism of all reality. This appears to be a surprising concession to a more static, objective, ontologism that runs counter to his whole programatic structure of promise and fulfilment. It is hard to see how history can still be filled with the dynamic of a movement initiated by promise, and straining in hope toward a future fulfilment, when all things have been taken up and reconciled within God. We might ask Moltmann: What has yet to be accomplished in the future? One wonders if he hasn't come surprisingly close to the position with which he finds fault with Barth, i.e., viewing the eschaton as only a noetic unveiling of an already accomplished reconciliation.

Be that as it may, one thing is certain: the practical effect is the same. Even with his dialectical modifications, which more fully account for the present reality of the kingdom in the cross and resurrection, Moltmann still maintains a thoroughgoing universalism that leaves the present reality of the Church only a functional position within this world. In THEOLOGY OF HOPE, all present reality is under the cross, but promised life by the event of the resurrection; in THE CRUCIFIED GOD, all present reality is taken up into God himself and thus granted a share in his future. In both cases, and eschatological universalism is maintained, and the ecclesiological result is a functional concept of the Church.

## C. The People of Promise

In his third major theological work, THE CHURCH IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT, Moltmann turns his attention to the people of promise, the Church. The first and most basic affirmation that must be made concerning ecclesiology, he believes, is that 'the lordship of Christ is the church's sole, and hence all-embracing, determining factor.'<sup>612</sup> The task of Christian theology is constantly to remind the Church of this fact. To affirm that the lordship of Christ is the Church's 'determining factor' means that the Church is set within the history of God's promise in Jesus Christ, and lives on the way toward its fulfilment. There is a 'teleological principle,' Moltmann tells us, that has penetrated to the very heart of the Christian message. The 'theological final clauses' of Paul reveal this most clearly: the meaning of the justification of sinners is the liberating lordship of Christ over the dead and the living; the meaning of the lordship of Christ 'is the complete rule of God in which God himself is "everything to every one."<sup>613</sup> The Church is the community which lives according to this teleological dynamism. It is the fellowship of justified sinners, who live under the lordship of Christ, and who have their eyes fixed on the final triumph of God's lordship.<sup>614</sup> This community of Christ comes about through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>615</sup> It is the Holy Spirit who works in the people and events of history in order to realize concretely in the present the future glory of God.

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612 Moltmann, CPS, p.5.

613 Ibid., p.32.

614 Ibid., p.33.

615 Ibid.

Consequently the whole eschatology of the history of Christ which is expounded in the theological final clauses can also be described as the history of the Spirit, a result of the workings and indwelling of the Spirit through which the future that is hoped for enters into history. 616

So in his theology of Pentecost, Moltmann manages to hold on to the eschatological structure of reality for which he argued so forcefully in his theology of Easter, and yet continues to advance along the lines of his theology of Good Friday by maintaining a present reality of the coming kingdom. The result is a pneumatological eschatology that, in my judgment, maintains the strengths of both earlier formulations, yet avoids some of their weaknesses. Contrary to THEOLOGY OF HOPE, Moltmann is able to keep in hand both a vigorous eschatological theology, yet not do violence to the fact of the kingdom's concrete historical presence. And contrary to THE CRUCIFIED GOD, while making a theological space for the kingdom's present manifestation, he does not risk undermining the interrelation of promise and fulfilment that he believes is basic to Christian faith and its theological formulations.

Throughout THE CHURCH IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT, Moltmann keeps two facts about the Church in tension: (1) the Church, as the work of the Holy Spirit is 'itself the beginning and earnest of the future of the new creation,'<sup>617</sup> yet, (2) 'in the longer-range history of the Spirit the church is a way and a transition to the kingdom of God,'<sup>618</sup> and thus

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616 Ibid., p.34.

617 Ibid., p.33.

618 Ibid., p.35.



lives in anticipation. It is 'hope lived in fellowship.'<sup>619</sup>

'The church in the power of the Spirit is not yet the kingdom of God, but it is its anticipation in history'<sup>620</sup> - a concrete anticipation in which 'the coming glory already becomes efficacious in the present life.'<sup>621</sup> As the people of the kingdom, the Church lives in joyous liberation of the divine lordship. It incarnates the future joy of the eschatological glory of God.<sup>622</sup>

In the remembered and hoped for liberty of Christ the church serves the liberation of men by demonstrating human freedom in its own life and by manifesting its rejoicing in that freedom. 623

Its joy is not an escapist flight from the difficulties of worldly existence. On the contrary, because believers live in the freedom of the eschaton that contradicts present reality, they engage in the politics of the cross. For 'believers the divine glory is revealed on the face of the crucified Jesus; it no longer belongs to the crowns of kings or the fame of nations or any earthly authorities.'<sup>624</sup> As this 'iconoclasm of the cross' manifests itself in the Christian fellowship, the future takes shape in the present, bringing its liberation into the present world of bondage and alienation.

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619 Ibid.

620 Ibid., p.19.

621 Ibid., p.59.

622 Ibid., pp.108-14.

623 Jürgen Moltmann, THEOLOGY AND JOY, trans. Reinhard Ulrich (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1973), p.87.

624 Moltmann, CPS, p.92.

This joyous, messianic fellowship is enabled to become comprehensible to itself as the Holy Spirit grants it certain 'processes and experiences.'<sup>625</sup> What does Moltmann mean by 'processes and experiences' of the Spirit? These are

on the one hand the 'means of salvation' - proclamation, the Lord's Supper, worship, prayer, acts of blessing and the way in which individual and fellowship live. On the other hand, they are the 'charismata,' the ministries, gifts and tasks (or offices, as they are called) in this fellowship for society. <sup>626</sup>

The details of Moltmann's theology of the sacraments and ministries of the Church cannot be fully presented here, but this much should be noted: through proclamation and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper the kingdom is mediated to the world, and in the power of the Spirit's 'charismata' it is concretely manifested.<sup>627</sup>

Given Moltmann's recognition of the present reality of the future, which is brought about in the life and ministry of the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit, we might be led to assume that he would acknowledge an ontological distinction between the Church and the world. If the Spirit's work gives rise to a community of the future, who live in the present joy and power of the coming glory, and who thus live in contradiction to the sinful brokenness of this world, then it would appear that Moltmann's theology has moved from an ecclesiological functionalism to a position congenial to the idea that there is a distinction in essence between the Church and the world.

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<sup>625</sup> Ibid., p.198.

<sup>626</sup> Ibid.

<sup>627</sup> Ibid., pp.197-336.

However, such is not the case. Moltmann is constantly influenced by his eschatological universalism. Though the Spirit makes use of the Church in the present, it is only as a way or transition to the final all-inclusive reality, the kingdom of God. It is quite proper, according to Moltmann, to speak of the Church as 'the people of the kingdom'<sup>628</sup> - a people on the move toward God's future, an 'exodus church.' But this movement in no way sets the Church off in distinction from the rest of the world, for it finds itself in a universal movement and understands itself as only 'the beginning of the liberation of the whole enslaved creation for its consummation in glory.'<sup>629</sup>

Early in his thought, Moltmann laid down the principle of the eschatological determination of essence - a dictum which has consistently influenced his ecclesiology.

All being has its horizon of meaning, is ek-sistent, points toward something, has a tendency and an interpretation in the direction which it ought to go. We cannot talk about Christianity if we do not talk about that towards which it is directed, if we have nothing to say about that which constitutes the eschatological content of its history. That is all that is meant when the church is characterized as an instrumental function of the apostolic process of God's history. 630

Two things should be noted from this quote. First, Moltmann is saying that the being of the Church is determined by its 'horizon of meaning'; its essence is ordained by its future. We should recall, at this point, that Moltmann's eschatology is hammered out on the anvil of an all-embracing universalism. What that means, therefore, is that

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628 Ibid., p.83.

629 Ibid.

630 Jürgen Moltmann, HOPE AND PLANNING, trans. Margaret Clarkson (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1971), p.145. See also TH, p.325.

the Church and the world both exist in the same 'horizon of meaning'; the 'being' of each, as it is defined by a common future, must be identical. The second thing to notice in the above quote is the consequent image he has of the Church: a functional instrument of the apostolic process of God's history. 'Mission does not come from the church; it is from mission and in light of mission that the church has to be understood.'<sup>631</sup> From the vantage point of the eschaton, Moltmann tends 'to assimilate the total reality of the church to the action of mission.'<sup>632</sup> The Church is nothing in itself; its complete existence is defined by its action on behalf of the coming kingdom. All reality has the same future, and is thus indistinguishable in essence; the difference between the Church and the world can therefore only be a relative difference. At the vanguard of the eschatological movement of all creation, the Church serves the apostolic function of witness to the coming eschaton.

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631 Moltmann, CPS, p.10. Meeks, in ORIGINS OF THE THEOLOGY OF HOPE, maintains that Moltmann came into contact with, and was significantly influenced by, the Dutch Apostolate theology, especially J. C. Hoekendijk (see Meeks, ORIGINS OF THE THEOLOGY OF HOPE, pp.24-30). Hoekendijk summarizes his position this way: 'The nature of the church can be sufficiently defined by its function, i.e., its participation in Christ's apostolic ministry' (J. C. Hoekendijk, THE CHURCH INSIDE OUT, trans. Isaac C. Rottenberg, ed. L. A. Hoedemaker & Pieter Tijmes (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1966), p.40).

632 Meeks, ORIGINS OF THE THEOLOGY OF HOPE, p.160.

Thus it appears that while Moltmann wants to base his ecclesiology on christology, what has in fact been the determining factor is his eschatology - specifically, his universalism which left him no other alternative than to evacuate the distinction between the Church and the world of any essential difference. What is left is simply the Church in actu, wholly defined by its missionary task.

The question arises, however, whether Moltmann is not guilty of an ecclesiological docetism. It appears he is, for taken to its logical conclusion, Moltmann's theology leads to an discarnate mission. Even if the missionary function of the Church is granted a central place in our understanding of its existence, is it not necessary to speak about the being of the Church as well as its act? Can missionary action completely exhaust the meaning of a Church grounded in the incarnate Christ? If the future concretely makes a place for itself in the present through the work of the Holy Spirit, then is there not an appropriate way to speak about the being of a Church that is not merely a means to a future end, but is, at least partially, an end in itself? For

a new generation of Christians who will again have to struggle to find their identity as Christians in the church and for a political theology that must relate to the complexities of urban power systems, there needs to be an ecclesiology which can focus on the embodiment of the Christian mission. 633

The choice between an ontological or simply functional distinction between the Church and the world has enormous practical ramifications, as Moltmann's discussion of mission strategy reveals. In discussing the

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633 Ibid., p.161.

Church's relationship with other world religions, for example, Moltmann shows clearly how a functional concept of the Church can lead to a relativization of its significance in the world. What is Christianity's missionary task in relation to other religions? Moltmann recognizes that it is 'one goal of mission to awaken faith, to baptize, to found churches and to form new life under the lordship of Christ,'<sup>634</sup> but one cannot help but feel he has given mere 'lip service' to this task. In five short sentences he dispenses with this part of mission and spends the next ten pages underscoring the need for a mission strategy that aims toward 'the qualitative alteration of life's atmosphere,'<sup>635</sup> by which he means the 'aim to "infect" people, whatever their religion, with the spirit of hope, love and responsibility toward the world.'<sup>636</sup> This latter type of mission takes place in dialogue, he tells us, and that means Christianity must shake off the vestiges of 'absolutism' and renounce 'its exclusive claim in relation to other religions.'<sup>637</sup> As a new model for the Church's role in the world, Moltmann suggests 'the formula of the critical catalyst.'<sup>638</sup> 'A catalyst causes elements to combine simply through its presence.'<sup>639</sup> Thus, simply by their

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634 Moltmann, CPS, p.152.

635 Ibid.

636 Ibid.

637 Ibid., p.158.

638 Ibid.

639 Ibid.

presence, Christians will indirectly infect other religions 'with Christian ideas, values and principles'<sup>640</sup> so that in the end 'a Buddhist, Hindu, Moslem, animist, Confucian, Shintoist Christianity will come into being.'<sup>641</sup>

But is this the aim of Christian mission? Moltmann's concern to 'infect' other religions 'with Christian ideas, values and principles' sounds like an echo of the played-out theme of nineteenth century liberalism - a discordant melody falling on ears tuned to the theological leitmotifs of the twentieth century. If it is a goal of mission, as Moltmann grants, to awaken faith and baptize, then is it not the Church's aim to awaken faith in the lordship of Christ and to baptize in the name of the triune God revealed in him? Moltmann is quite eager to underscore the radical implications of the lordship of Christ when it comes to the political realm of life, vigorously asserting the 'iconoclasm of the cross.' Well, does not this cross also throw down the gods of religion? Are there not religious as well as political idols that are dethroned in the affirmation 'Jesus is Lord'? Moltmann strangely retreats into a vague liberality with regard to religious systems that confess other 'lords,' and in a way highly inconsistent with his own concern to emphasize the lordship of Christ. In so doing, he seems to have forgotten his own admonition to Pannenberg that Christian faith awaits the future of Jesus Christ, not an abstract eschaton. Now he appears to be speaking about an idealized future defined by 'Christian ideas, values and principles' - whatever that means. Biblical faith is not directed to a 'Christian idea,' but to a person,

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640 Ibid.

641 Ibid., p.162.

Jesus Christ, and to confess him as lord is to recognize and accept the 'scandal of particularity.' 'And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.'<sup>642</sup> Of course, Moltmann recognizes the salvific uniqueness of the name of Christ, but he extrapolates from that name a future so universal and comprehensive in its embrace that confession of the name becomes only relatively important. 'No culture,' Moltmann writes, 'must be pushed out and no religion extinguished.'<sup>643</sup> There is no need to push these out, presumably, because all things will share in the coming glory. They must, however, be given a 'messianic direction towards the kingdom.'<sup>644</sup> But what can that mean, if not a re-directing of all peoples to the Messiah, to the Lord himself? As Moltmann has taught us, it is his future we look for, not a realm of idealized principles abstracted from our present notions of universal peace and harmony.

In the end, Moltmann's eschatology overwhelms whatever ontological distinction between the Church and the world we may have been able to postulate from his doctrine of the Spirit's manifestation of the

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642 Acts 4:12. Cf. John Baillie's response to the question, 'Why only in one name?' '. . . when we ask ourselves why these things should be, we have to answer simply that we do not know. But then why should we expect to know? We have to take experience as we find it.' Nevertheless, a little more can be said about it. 'For if it had been so that each could find God in his own way, each would be finding him without at the same time finding his brother . . . . If the various tribes of mankind could find their ultimate enlightenment and salvation in different names, the human race would forever remain divided' (John Baillie, THE SENSE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p.207-8).

643 Moltmann, CPS, p.103.

644 Ibid.



kingdom in the present reality of the Church. Finally there can be no essential difference for him, because all things have been granted a space in the eschaton.

In THEOLOGY OF HOPE, the logic of promise led him to posit two contradictory ages: one of universal godlessness (symbolized by the cross), the other of universal salvation (symbolized by the resurrection). In THE CRUCIFIED GOD, Moltmann set aside this strict contradiction and began to deal more fully with the dialectical relationship between Good Friday and Easter, but prematurely (it seems) reconciled it all in God, so that all history - broken and sinful - is somehow 'taken up' into God and thus guaranteed life in his future. Would it not have accorded more adequately with the biblical witness to continue the dialectic into the future of Christ himself? If we grant Moltmann his contention that the cross explains the meaning of the resurrection, and hence the coming kingdom, can we not then speak about both the judgment and grace of God in the future of Jesus Christ? Certainly Paul did not hesitate to do so. To the Thessalonians, who had certain erroneous opinions about the parousia of the Lord, Paul wrote about this event in a way which indicates that he envisioned a Day of both judgment and grace,

when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at in all who have believed. 645

This passage seems harshly contradictory to Paul's witness that in Christ God will 'reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross.'<sup>646</sup>

What then is our conclusion to be - the word concerning judgment and separation, heaven and hell, or the message of universal redemption? Both aspects remain juxtaposed in their harsh incompatibility. We cannot even assign them to their respective witnesses. They stand in the same epistle, in fact in the very same chapter. And the one, by its very absoluteness, logically excludes the other. Which of them is the ultimately valid point of view?

Our answer is: both voices are the Word of God . . . . Only through this indissoluble duality do we grasp the duality of God's being which is yet one: His holiness and His love. All symmetrical, logically satisfying knowledge of God is death bringing. <sup>647</sup>

Moltmann himself has pointed the way for us. He teaches us to understand the resurrection and coming kingdom in reference to the cross. If we see revealed in that event the dialectic between God's grace and judgment, then should we not expect to see a fuller revelation of that dialectic in the future, and expect its reconciliation to take place only within the person and work of the coming Christ himself? Our hope, therefore, must be even more radically open-ended than Moltmann's theology will allow: we 'see through a glass darkly' and can in no way fathom the how of his final reconciliation in judgment and grace. This does not entail uncertainty about the future outcome of life in Christ; in Christ we share in his assured victory over sin and death. But it does mean that we listen carefully

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<sup>646</sup> Colossians 1:20.

<sup>647</sup> Emil Brunner, ETERNAL HOPE, trans. Harold Knight (London: Lutterworth Press, 1954), pp.183-84.

to the warnings of Scripture about the fearful possibility of unbelief, of being outside the realm of Christ's grace, personally face to face with the holy judgment of God against sin.

In Christ, God has revealed not only his mercy, but also his unrelenting condemnation against sin. Moltmann has only made brief reference to the element of judgment in the event of the cross. This is due, no doubt, to his desire to be rid of any ideas connected with atonement vis-a-vis the law. Because of its supposed retrospective character, expiation is ruled out. Rather, he sees salvation as a panentheistic inclusion of all reality in the being of God: in becoming one with us in the brokenness of sin's consequences, God takes all - even godlessness and godforsakenness - up into himself, and all things are therefore guaranteed life through participation in his being. But has Moltmann done justice to the judgment of God against humanity and its pride? When Moltmann deals with sin, it is almost always in a passive sense, emphasizing its consequences: he speaks of brokenness, pain, suffering. Is not this, however, to neglect the essential element of sin, its active disobedience? If all sin and godlessness have been taken up into God, then can we ever speak about God's judgment over against human rebellion? It would not seem so. Thus Moltmann quite consistently expects a universal restoration when all things, having already been taken up into God, will participate in the life of God's future.

It is astonishing, however, that Moltmann's theology, which aims to be so thoroughly eschatological, almost completely ignores the New Testament passages that speak directly about the coming

eschaton. No doubt this is because they speak not only of the consummation of grace but also of a coming judgment - an embarrassing problem for the eschatological triumphalism which is the undercurrent of Moltmann's theology. So he is more content, apparently, to extrapolate from his own understanding of the 'inner tendency' of the Christ event; but it is regrettable that he does not at least acknowledge the direct witness Scripture itself makes to the nature of the coming future of Jesus Christ. Had he done so, his eschatology would perhaps rest less assuredly on a universal restoration of all creation, and its consequent levelling and relativizing of all distinctions in present reality, and been more truly informed by the dialectic of grace and judgment revealed in the crucifixion of the risen Lord.

PART TWO

CHAPTER V  
THE CONSUMING FIRE

In the year of Grace, 1654,  
On Monday, 23d of November, Feast of St. Clement,  
Pope and Martyr, and of others in the Martyrology,  
Vigil of Saint Chrysogonus, Martyr and others,  
From about half past ten in the evening  
until about half past twelve

FIRE

God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of  
the philosophers and scholars.  
Certitude. Certitude. Feeling. Joy. Peace.  
God of Jesus Christ. 648

A few days after Pascal's death in 1662, a servant noticed by chance that in the lining of his master's coat there was something thicker than the rest. Upon tearing it open, he discovered a little piece of parchment paper covered with Pascal's own writing.<sup>649</sup> It was a testimonium to a life-changing encounter. For eight years Pascal kept close to himself a record of a two-hour meeting with - FIRE. The Unexpected had invaded his soul: a God 'not of philosophers and scholars,' well-defined and domesticated by neat and tidy systems of thought, but the Incomprehensibly Greater One, the God of Jesus Christ.

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648 Blaise Pascal, as quoted by Emile Cailliet,  
PASCAL - GENIUS IN THE LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE  
(Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1945),  
p.131.

649 Ibid.

After four chapters of theological analysis, Pascal's experience raises for us some disturbing questions. In writing about others' thoughts about God, has it been the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with whom we have had to do, or simply the God 'of the philosophers and scholars'? By manipulating the tools of logic, intellectual reflection, and dialectical argument, have we constructed an image of 'God' limited by the dimensions of our rational powers? Have we been trying to define the indefinable, understand the incomprehensible, circumscribe the infinite? Have the intellectual wranglings of the last two hundred pages brought us any nearer to a genuine knowledge of the One who transcends all human thought and speculation? As interesting as the thoughts of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Paul Tillich, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Jürgen Moltmann have been, has this exercise in theological criticism been carefully and coolly crafted far away from the singeing heat of the Holy? Have we been burned - even warmed? - by the FIRE that consumed Pascal on the night of November 23, 1654? Is not this God always beyond our formulations? Does he not constantly encompass us about as Night, as we walk by the light of our reason? Or - better, perhaps - is he not always the blinding Sun that darkens our minds' eyes and sends us reeling back from arrogant attempts to gaze into the light of his truth? In the end, are we perhaps left before the Abyss with only dumb silence and a prayer for the illuminating FIRE?

Because of the nature of the object of its study, Christian theology is constantly faced with these questions. In that it

seeks to speak coherently about God, it will continue down the road of rational analysis and systematic clarification; but, inasmuch as it seeks to speak coherently about God, it inevitably treads a perilous route between the Scylla of intellectual arrogance and the Charybdis of a mute, faithless witness. The intention of this chapter is to show that the Consuming Fire of the Holy is knowable, not in spite of, but precisely because of, his otherness. That which sets God 'above' is exactly that which sets him 'near.' The incomprehensible is the given comprehensibility of God. Divine separateness defeats separation. The distinction is the overcoming of the distance. God is the alien, burning fire of the consuming love in Jesus Christ. Our mission is to understand this.



### A. Reconnaissance

Throughout the first part of this study our thesis was that there has been, in twentieth century Protestant theology, a notable loss of ontological distinction between the Church and the world. To demonstrate this, we have presented the thought of four theologians and have tried to show that their different approaches have resulted either in an immanentism or a universalism - both of which effectively obliterate any essential distinction between the Church of Jesus Christ and its context, the world. We have been only secondarily concerned about what these theologians have directly written about the Church and its relationship to the world (which may or may not have been consistent with the rest of their theological formulations); rather, we have sought to show how, in the case of each, the structure of his theology as a whole resulted in this loss of distinction.

(1) In Chapter I, we argued that Dietrich Bonhoeffer took the incarnation as his starting-point for christology. Because Jesus Christ is the Incarnate One, Bonhoeffer raised the question of the place of Jesus Christ. A Christ without a place in the world would be a docetic, unbiblical Christ. Where is the place of Jesus Christ, according to Bonhoeffer? His answer to this question varied. First, he identified the Church as the place of Jesus Christ, but as he followed out the logic of the finitum capax infiniti and the genus majestaticum of his Lutheran tradition, he finally affirmed the world as the place of Jesus Christ. By this identification, he sought to bring into a comprehensive whole the one reality of God. The incarnation for Bonhoeffer meant the complete abolition of the distinction between

the Holy and the profane. By means of an incarnationalism, therefore, Bonhoeffer was led to an immanentism which resulted not only in the loss of ontological distinction between the Church and the world, but very nearly even the loss of distinction between God and the world. Thus Bonhoeffer lost the concept of an ontological distinction between the Church and the world from below.

(2) Paul Tillich, likewise, created a theological system which eventuated in a sweeping immanentism, but unlike Bonhoeffer, he did not take the incarnation as his starting-point. For Tillich, rather, it was an abstract transcendentalism that led to this end. In Chapter II we contended that Tillich, though employing contemporary existentialist terminology, was really a loyal descendent of nineteenth century idealism. By an intellectual ascent into the heavens, he sought to bring together into one complete system the reality of God and the reality of the world. In an attempt to maintain the radical 'otherness' of God, Tillich defined God as 'being-itself,' or 'the ground of all being.' The consequence of such an abstract attempt to preserve the transcendence of God was the almost complete loss of distinction between God and humanity. His ontology was sweeping, carrying in its wake the divine and the human, grace and sin, faith and love. Thus Tillich lost the concept of an ontological distinction between the Church and the world from above.

(3) Like Tillich, Wolfhart Pannenberg seems also to be motivated by a passion for wholeness. He, too, in many ways, is a grateful heir of the idealism of the last century, particularly the philosophy

of Hegel. But he recognizes that Hegel's system of universal history was defective inasmuch as Hegel had to see himself as being at the end of history in order to comprehend the meaning of the whole. This problem is overcome for Pannenberg by a proper understanding of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In this event, he maintains, the end has broken into the midst of history in a proleptic way. This means that history can be grasped in its universal significance, and yet, since the full revelation of the end is still outstanding, the openness (contingency) that is a requisite of history is still preserved. The further implication of the resurrection is that God has validated the pre-Easter activity (teaching and death) of Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, because Jesus taught that the kingdom of God will come in the future, and because God's reign and his being are to be conceived of as one, God is 'the power of the future' and, in this way, is still in the process of coming to be. The future, then, becomes the dominant category for Pannenberg. In fact, we saw that it exerts an almost totalitarian influence over his theology. Creation, for example, is not an event that happened in the past (how could it be if God's power is future?), but is rather the way of speaking about things as they flow out of the future. The future, for Pannenberg, is not so much the end as it is the beginning; all things flow out of the future (God), and, at the same time, all things flow toward the future. Thus Pannenberg's system merges together the Alpha and Omega as it envisions a cyclical movement of reality, complete in its wholeness. The consequence is a theology with little place for the brokenness of sin and the grace of its

overcoming, and no place at all for an ontological distinction between the Church and the world. The universal future is, for Pannenberg, the creative power of a perfect cosmic whole. Thus Pannenberg loses the concept of an ontological distinction between the Church and the world from the beginning.

(4) Jürgen Moltmann shares a similar concern to understand the eschatological implications of the Christ event. Unlike Pannenberg, however, he wants to maintain a more open-ended future. This is because of the promissory nature of revelation: it points beyond itself to a new reality which stands in contradiction to the present. Nevertheless, as Moltmann's thought develops, he seems to be willing to say more and more about the nature of the eschaton. On the basis of Jesus Christ (the promissory event), Moltmann discerns an 'inner tendency' which reveals the 'intention of God.' This is that all reality shall be granted a share in the eschatological victory promised in the resurrection. Since in the Cross God identified fully with all the brokenness of sin, and thereby absorbed it all into himself, all reality will in turn share in the triumph of the resurrection. (Conspicuously lacking in Moltmann's theology of the Cross is the notion of judgment against sin; rather, the central idea is God's complete identification with humanity in its sin.) Furthermore, Moltmann holds that the essence of a thing is determined by its future. Now this means, then, that since all things will automatically share in the future he has perceived in the 'inner tendency' of the Christ-event, all things must share in the same essence. Any difference, therefore, between the Church and the

world dissolves before a triumphant universalism that imposes an ontological conformity on all present reality. Thus Moltmann loses the concept of an ontological distinction between the Church and the world from the end.

The reconnaissance of Part I seems to indicate, therefore, two major problems: an immanentism, in the cases of Bonhoeffer and Tillich; and an automatic universalism, in the cases of Pannenberg and Moltmann. As far as the relationship between the Church and the world is concerned, both lead to the same conclusion: there is no essential difference, no distinction in being, between the Church and the world.

At this point, we cannot evade an obvious question. If four theologians of the calibre and influence of Bonhoeffer, Tillich, Pannenberg and Moltmann have developed theologies which call for the removal of the notion of an ontological distinction between the Church and the world, then why persist in the criticism? With the cumulative force of these theologies clearly flowing in one direction, why fight the current in an attempt to swim upstream? Is it worth the effort? Indeed, is it even necessary?

The rest of this chapter is an attempt to answer these questions. It is my conviction that the ontological distinction between the Church and the world is a truth that must be affirmed by theology, resting as it does on solid biblical and theological ground. The case for this has yet to be made, of course, but if I am correct in this judgment, and right in my analysis of the four contemporary theologians that have engaged our thinking so far, then it is clear that, whatever

we say finally about the relationship between the Church and the world, we must constantly keep before us the two main difficulties that have emerged.

As to the problem of immanentism (incarnational or transcendental), our first concern must be with a doctrine of God-in-relationship-to-the-world, for the loss of distinction in the Church-world relationship is but a reflection, in this case, of the loss of distinction in the God-world relationship.

Ronald Gregor Smith put it this way:

To find a way of asserting simultaneously the absolute difference of God from everything else, and his relation to everything else, without diminution of the difference, is without any doubt the key problem for theological thought. 650

With the problem of universalism, our concern must be with a doctrine of God-in-relationship-to-the-world-in-sin; that is to say, with a soteriology, informed by the dialectic of grace and judgment, which fails to take seriously neither God's opposition to the world-in-sin, nor his gracious favour to the world-in-sin. Neither his distinction from the world nor his decision for the world must be lost. And further, we must search for a way among the many possible theological paths which keeps in view both the certainty of God's salvation in Jesus Christ (without abstracting from it a 'law' of

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650 Ronald Gregor Smith, THE DOCTRINE OF GOD, ed. K. Gregor Smith and A. D. Galloway (London: Collins, 1970), p.89. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to this concern, with special reference to Bonhoeffer and Tillich.

universalism, positing an 'automatic' end of history), and the freedom of grace.<sup>651</sup>

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<sup>651</sup> Chapter VI will propose a solution to this problem and consider it with special regard to Pannenberg and Moltmann.

## B. Reveille and Password

In I Peter we find an exhortation to the Church 'to be a holy priesthood,'<sup>652</sup> grounded in the fact that it is 'a holy nation.'<sup>653</sup> Accordingly, the Creed confesses 'one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.' What is the nature of this holiness? Does it perhaps provide a way into the question of the relationship between the Church and the world that offers us a way out of the theological cul-de-sac at which we have apparently arrived? Since we have seen that the view one holds of the Church-world relationship is often a consequence of one's view of the God-world relationship, we will want to ask whether the concept of the Holy is perhaps a clue with which to discover a fundamental framework for a theology of God-in-relation-to-the-world. Indeed, such is the case, for 'of all the qualities attributed to the divine nature there is one which, in virtue both of the frequency and the emphasis with which it is used, occupies a position of unique importance - namely, that of holiness.'<sup>654</sup> Add to this the fact that 'holiness,' by definition,

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652 I Peter 2:5.

653 I Peter 2:9.

654 Walther Eichrodt, THEOLOGY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT - Vol.I, translated by J. A. Baker (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1961), p.270. So also J. Muilenburg, 'Holiness,' THE INTERPRETER'S DICTIONARY OF THE BIBLE - Vol.II, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), p.616: '. . . "holiness" gives expression to the essential nature of the "sacred." It is therefore to be understood, not as one attribute among other attributes, but as the innermost reality to which all others are related.'



refers to that which is 'sacred' as opposed to that which is 'profane' (i.e., it is a word denoting a certain relationship between the divine and the non-divine), and it becomes clear that in this word we may possibly have a key with which to unlock a deeper understanding of the relationship between God and the world, and also, therefore, a more adequate grasp of the relationship between the Church and the world. If once we get a hold of what the concept of the Holy means in reference to God, we shall then be able to apply that knowledge to the 'holy priesthood,' the Church of Jesus Christ. To this end, let us consider (1) the biblical data, and (2) the major theological formulations of the idea of the Holy.

(1) In so far as the meaning of 'Holy' can be determined etymologically, the word originally had reference to 'that which is marked off, separated, withdrawn from ordinary use.'<sup>655</sup> (The root  $\omega\tau\phi$  apparently developed from  $\tau\phi$ , 'to divide.')<sup>656</sup> As von Rad stated it,

the holy could much more aptly be designated the great stranger in the human world, that is, a datum of experience which can never really be co-ordinated into the world in which man is at home, and over against which he initially feels fear rather than trust - it is, in fact, the 'wholly other.' 657

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655 Eichrodt, THEOLOGY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT - Vol.I, p.270.

656 O. Procksch, 'ἅγιος', THEOLOGICAL DICTIONARY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT - Vol.I, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids & London: William B. Eerdmans, 1964), p.89. My analysis of the biblical meaning of 'holiness' is very much indebted to this excellent linguistic and theological study. See pp.88-115.

657 Gerhard von Rad, OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY - Vol.I. trans. D. M. G. Stalker (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), p.205.

The Holy, then, is something utterly distinct, 'the great stranger in the human world.'

In the life and faith of Israel, the term 'holiness' underwent a significant development. Procksch has outlined two major streams of tradition which, though often overlapping, are distinctly discernable in the literature of the Old Testament: the cultic and the prophetic.<sup>658</sup>

a. 'From the very first  $\omega\tau\rho$  is very closely linked with the cultic. Anything related to the cultus, whether God, man, things, space or time, can be brought under the term  $\omega\tau\rho$ .'<sup>659</sup> According to Procksch, the substantive  $\omega\tau\rho$  'always denotes a state and not an action.'<sup>660</sup> The term is not found in Genesis where the cult plays no significant role, but it does emerge in Exodus with the story of Moses. Its static nature is shown in the fact that objects are 'holy,' e.g., the ground around the burning bush (Ex. 3:5), Gilgal before Jericho (Jos. 5:15), Jerusalem (Is. 48:2; Neh. 11:1,18), the site of the temple (Is. 11:9; 56:7), the temple itself (Is. 64:10), the 'holiest of holies' (Ps. 28:2). And 'the more deeply we penetrate into the priestly literature of the Pentateuch, the more common the word becomes.'<sup>661</sup> In Leviticus we read of holy offerings (2:3,10),

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658 Procksch,  $\acute{\alpha}\gamma\iota\omicron\varsigma$ , pp.89-94.

659 Ibid., p.89.

660 Ibid.

661 Ibid., p.90.

the unleavened bread and the holy place where it is to be eaten (6:16-17), the 'most holy' guilt offering (7:1), holy linen (16:4), holy garments (16:4), the holy place of atonement (16:16-17), holy convocations (23:4), the holy tithe of the land (27:30), etc. These are 'holy things' (22:2) of the Lord. As the static conception of the Holy merges with the cultic, eventually 'the cultus itself comes under the threat of the purely material conception of holiness.'<sup>662</sup> This materialization of the Holy had become commonplace by the time of Jesus, as his rebuke of it seems to indicate (Matt. 23:17-19).

The cultic was not, however, completely limited by a materialized notion of 'holiness.' The adjective *קדוש* is more fluid in its renderings, and with it an important development takes place. This form of the word is used of persons. As a predicate of God, it 'comes to have the meaning of divine, and thus becomes an adjective for God (Is. 5:16; 6:3; Hos. 11:9).'<sup>663</sup> The personalization of the Holy finally comes into its own as the substantive (*קדוש*), which originally had a purely static connotation, is applied to the name of God. In the priestly literature, the phrase *שם קדוש יהוה* is particularly common, as it is in the Psalter.<sup>664</sup> Through this process of personification, the concept of holiness is fused with that of divinity so that

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662 Ibid.

663 Ibid.

664 Ibid., p.91.

finally Yahweh's holiness is contrasted with everything creaturely.

The name, Word and Spirit of God are all forms of His revelation, but as *שְׁתִּיבָה* they are set in antithesis to everything worldly or creaturely, so that even the cultic is almost consumed by the divine. God's holiness thus becomes an expression for His perfection of being which transcends everything creaturely. 665

To sum up the exegetical investigation to this point: in its most primitive use, 'holiness' has to do with that which is separate; first, as applied to the cult, the holy things of God are perceived as set apart for his service; and second, as applied to the name and person of God, God himself is understood as set apart. Thus, the Holy is first a religious, and not an ethical, term. It indicates that which is alien to ordinary human life: either the personal being of God, or those things set apart by him.

Eventually, however, the ethical is brought into relationship with the religious. Because God has not only set apart objects for his use, but a people as well, the idea of the holy people, whose lives are marked by a specific conduct, emerges, as is seen in the so-called Holiness Code of Leviticus (17:26). Everything here is based on the basic statement in Leviticus 19:2: 'You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy.'

Yahweh's holiness demands the holiness of His people as a condition of intercourse. If the cultic character of holiness is prominent in this code, c.19 shows us that cultic qualification is inconceivable without purity. Cultic purity, however, demands personal purity. 666

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665 Ibid.

666 Ibid., p.92.

b. It is in prophetic theology that this ethicization of the Holy reaches full bloom. The prophets blast with abhorrence empty cultic ritualism and call the holy people of God to live justly by correcting oppression, defending the fatherless, and pleading for the widow (Is. 1:11-17). This emphasis on the conduct of the holy people is perhaps due to a new appreciation of the moral distinctives of their holy God. It is Hosea, especially, who recasts the idea of the Holy into a new form. Breaking completely with the cultic element of Israel's faith, Hosea presents Yahweh in moral antithesis to man<sup>667</sup>: 'I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst' (11:9). Because his holiness opposes the uncleanness of Israel (6:10; 9:4), it has a death-dealing aspect to it which causes the final 'stumbling' of Israel (14:1); yet, there is also a creative element to God's holiness which makes him a tree of life (14:8). In a way that is incomprehensible for human understanding, as well as astonishing in the context of Israel's religious traditions Hosea links the notions of holiness and love (11:1-4). 'The opposition of God's holiness to Israel thus works itself out in His love.'<sup>668</sup> The holiness of Yahweh, as the sum of his being, is precisely the creative love which heals as it tears, and brings life through its slaying (6:1).

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667 Ibid.

668 Ibid., p.93.

There can be no playing down the annihilating power of holiness, and the intensity of the threat of judgment in Hosea can hardly be exaggerated. Nevertheless, in the end it is the incomprehensible creative power of love which marks out Yahweh as the wholly 'other'; the one whose nature is in complete contrast to that of the created cosmos. 669

Or, as Procksch summed up Hosea's view, 'the antithesis between God and man consists in the very love which overcomes it.'<sup>670</sup>

In the theology of Isaiah, the concept of holiness is central. His God is 'the Holy One of Israel' (5:19,24; 10:20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19,23; 30:11,12,15; 31:1). 'The Trisagion of his initial vision (Is. 6:3) remained normative for his picture of God.'<sup>671</sup> In Isaiah's temple-experience, the fearfulness and awe before the 'wholly other' is surely present, but the contrast for Isaiah is moral in character: 'Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips . . .' (6:5). Atonement is needed, and it comes to Isaiah from the Holy God (6:7). In the presence of the Holy, Isaiah's state of moral estrangement is revealed, and at the same time the reconciliation is effected.

Deutero-Isaiah develops further Isaiah's image of the Holy One of Israel, filling the phrase with a content not unlike Hosea's theology of holiness. For Deutero-Isaiah the thought of redemption is central. The Holy One of Israel is the Redeemer (41:14; 43:3, 14-15; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 59:5). 'A connection is here established between salvation and holiness.'<sup>672</sup> Yahweh reveals his holy 'otherness'

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669 Eichrodt, OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY - Vol.I, p.281.

670 Procksch, *ἄγιος*, p.93.

671 Ibid.

672 Ibid., p.94.

precisely in his power to save, to be the Holy one of Israel.

If in the context of the cult, the Holy is susceptible to distortion through materialization, with the ethical the danger is moralistic legalism. That this, too, was prevalent in Jesus' time is seen from his rebuke of it (Mark 7:1-23).

c. Our survey of the Old Testament understanding of holiness has revealed the presence of two important aspects of the Holy. First, a religious use of the word 'holy,' quite independent from moral connotations, was intertwined with the cultic life of Israel. Here the word carried with it its most primitive etymological meaning: it signified the 'wholly other,' the utterly separate. It was as readily (perhaps more readily) applied to things as to persons. It indicated the complete distinction between the sacred and the profane.

But as the word 'holy' was associated with the God of Israel, it underwent a personalization - the consequence of which was an equation of holiness and divinity. As Israel's God, then, revealed himself and his will more fully, the concept of holiness progressed accordingly. As God acted on behalf of his people, showing himself to be their Redeemer, a God of love, these attributes became, by association, the characteristics of holiness. Thus an ethical dimension was introduced to the idea of the Holy.

So the eventual Old Testament view of the Holy may be summarized this way: the Holy is utterly distinct; the 'wholly other' is the God of Israel; his set-apartness consists in the fact that he is a Redeemer, the God of love. The holiness of God, therefore, refers

to the fact that God is antithetical to humanity precisely in his overcoming of the antithesis. As holy, he is the consuming fire of love.<sup>673</sup>

For Pascal, the encounter with this FIRE meant a meeting with not only the 'God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but also the 'God of Jesus Christ.' Indeed, Christian faith confesses that in Jesus Christ 'all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell.'<sup>674</sup> 'In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son . . . . He reflects the glory of God.'<sup>675</sup> If this is true, that is, if the God of the prophets is truly revealed in Jesus Christ, then we would expect this One to bear the image of the Holy.

'The description of Jesus as ἅγιος is rare . . . . On the other hand, it is ancient and full of content.'<sup>676</sup> In Luke it is grounded upon his miraculous birth, when the πνεῦμα ἅγιον came upon Mary. Because of his supernatural origin, 'the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God' (1:35). 'As ἅγιος τοῦ Θεοῦ, Jesus is 'the Firstborn and Iinaugurator of the pneumatic age

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673 In the Old Testament, holiness and fire are associated with striking frequency. 'It is in fire that Yahweh manifests himself most characteristically, especially in the great theophanies from the time of Moses on (Exod. 3:2-3; 19:18; 24:17; Deut. 4:12.24; 5:22-27; 9:3; Ps. 18:8-14 = II Sam. 22:9-15; Ezek. 1:4-28; Hab. 3:3-4); these and many other passages are often directly related to holiness' (Muilenburg, 'Holiness,' p.617).

674 Colossians 1:19.

675 Hebrews 1:1-3.

676 Procksch, 'ἅγιος' , p.101.



which will destroy the kingdom of demons.'<sup>677</sup> Thus the confession of his holiness issues forth from the demons (Luke 4:34; Mark 1:24). So, just as the Holy was first conceived of as the 'wholly other,' in separateness, Jesus is pictured by the Synoptics as set-in-opposition to the world of evil; and, even as the Holy took on an ethical connotation in prophetic theology, so Jesus is opposed by the 'unclean' demons.

In the Gospel of John the description of Jesus as 'the Holy One of God' is recorded in a place of extraordinary importance: in the confession of Peter (6:69). The disciple's recognition of Jesus as *ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ* is an act of faith, setting him beside the God whom Jesus addressed as 'Holy Father' (17:11).

Luke also puts the confession of Jesus' holiness on the lips of Peter, this time in his Pentecostal address: he rebukes his listeners because they 'denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer' (Ac. 3:14).<sup>678</sup> To recall von Rad's definition of the Holy, Jesus was 'the great stranger in the human world' . . . . who could 'never really be co-ordinated into the world.'<sup>679</sup>

Though the author of Hebrews does not specifically name Jesus 'the Holy One,' he does use an imagery to explain the efficacy of Christ's work that strongly points to his holiness. As the one

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<sup>677</sup> Ibid., p.102.

<sup>678</sup> See also Acts 4:27,30.

<sup>679</sup> von Rad, OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY - Vol.I, p.205.

who brought to fulfilment the Jewish cult, Jesus is both priest and victim. As the high-priest, he entered the 'holiest of holies' (9:3) to make a perfect atonement for the people, offering his own blood as a sacrifice for sins (9:25ff.). Thus Jesus himself is able 'to sanctify the people' (13:12), that is, to make them holy.<sup>680</sup> By his blood, consciences are purified from dead works to serve the living God (9:14). Again, we see the uniting of a religious (cultic) conception of holiness with the ethical (prophetic). The 'wholly other' of the priestly cult has acted to fulfil the prophetic exhortation to moral cleanliness.<sup>681</sup>

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680 For a fuller discussion of Christ's role as sanctifier, see Chapter VI.

681 With the exception of an occasional reference, New Testament biblical theology has scarcely noted the description of Jesus as 'the Holy One,' let alone fully developed its implications. Perhaps this is because its use as a christological title is not as common as other primitive Christian designations. See, for example, Rudolf Bultmann, THEOLOGY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT - Vols. I-II, trans. Kendrick Grobel (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1952-55); Hans Conzelmann, AN OUTLINE OF THE THEOLOGY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1969), esp. pp. 72ff., 336ff; Oscar Cullmann, THE CHRISTOLOGY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, trans. Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A. M. Hall (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1959), esp. p. 285; Frederick C. Grant, AN INTRODUCTION TO NEW TESTAMENT THOUGHT (New York and Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950); George Eldon Ladd, A THEOLOGY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, (Guildford and London: Lutterworth Press, 1975), esp. p. 165; Alan Richardson, AN INTRODUCTION TO THE THEOLOGY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1958), esp. pp. 146ff; Ethelbert Stauffer, NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY, trans. John Marsh (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1955), esp. pp. 112-16.

(2) What, then, are the theological implications of this summary of the biblical data? How has systematic theology accounted for this material in its definitions of holiness? Following the different strands of biblical witness, the Holy has been defined a. religiously, b. morally, and c. Christocentrically.

a. A theological discussion of the Holy can hardly avoid Rudolf Otto's very influential book, THE IDEA OF THE HOLY. 'It is probably the most widely read theological work in German of the twentieth century.'<sup>682</sup> The most significant thing about this book is that it vigorously champions the religious aspect of the Holy, in contradistinction from the ethical. Whereas the Holy had usually been identified by theologians with absolute moral good, 'Otto defined the holy as an independent category.'<sup>683</sup> Not only did he set it apart from the moral, he also separated it from the rational.<sup>684</sup> To describe the Holy in its ineffable character,<sup>685</sup> Otto introduces a term coined from the Latin numen, 'the numinous.'<sup>686</sup> The numinous is the object outside the perceiving mind, to which the mind turns spontaneously when encountered.<sup>687</sup> It causes the 'creature-feeling' to arise within, 'the note of submergence into nothingness before an

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682 Zahrt, THE QUESTION OF GOD, p.48.

683 Ibid.

684 Rudolf Otto, THE IDEA OF THE HOLY - AN INQUIRY INTO THE NON-RATIONAL FACTOR IN THE IDEA OF THE DIVINE AND ITS RELATION TO THE RATIONAL, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1923; 1977 reprint), p.5.

685 Ibid.

686 Ibid., pp.6-7.

687 Ibid., p.11.

overpowering, absolute might of some kind.'<sup>688</sup> The numinous has two sides to it. On the one hand, it is the mysterium tremendum, the element of daunting awefulness, majesty, that which evokes awe and terror in a person - the 'wholly other.'<sup>689</sup> On the other hand, there is something attractive, fascinating, about the numinous; it has a magnetic appeal. This characteristic he calls the fascinans. 'These two qualities, the daunting and the fascinating, now combine in a strange harmony of contrasts,'<sup>690</sup> together representing the content of the Holy.

That a person can perceive the numinous is due to the fact that the capacity for encountering the Holy is an inherent quality in the human creature. Otto speaks of the 'predisposition,' the 'religious impulsion,' in humanity.<sup>691</sup> With the foundation thus

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688 Ibid., p.10. Otto prefers to speak of 'creature-consciousness' rather than Schleiermacher's 'feeling of dependence,' believing he thereby avoids Schleiermacher's subjectivism. John Harvey points out, correctly I think, that Otto's intention in THE IDEA OF THE HOLY was to emphasize the objective reality of the Holy: ' . . . Otto's emphasis is always upon the objective reference, and upon subjective feelings only as the indispensable clue to this . . . He was . . . really opposing the subjectivist trend in religious thought' (John W. Harvey, 'Translator's Preface,' THE IDEA OF THE HOLY by Rudolf Otto, p.xvii). Nevertheless, it is doubtful that he succeeded in his task, for the larger part of his work consists of a psychological description of the effects caused by the holy object. Otto never really breaks out of the subjectivist framework, for the Holy is always defined in terms of the experience it generates in man's perceiving consciousness. Cf. Friedrich Schleiermacher, THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, ed. H. R. Mackintosh & J. S. Stewart, trans. D. M. Baillie, et. al. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), pp.341-45, where the holiness of God is treated under the section dealing with the consciousness of sin.

689 Otto, THE IDEA OF THE HOLY, pp.12ff.

690 Ibid., p.31.

691 Ibid., p.116.

laid, Otto proceeds with an empirical study of the appearances of the Holy in its earliest manifestations (magic, worship of the dead, animism, loathing of the unclean, etc.),<sup>692</sup> its development from the 'crude' stage to higher religions (as the numinous reveals itself, thus supplying a rational element, yet without minimizing the non-rational),<sup>693</sup> and its fullest development in Christianity.<sup>694</sup> Why can he assert that Christianity is the most perfect revelation of the Holy? It is by 'intuition' that we perceive the Holy in Christ.

The Cross of Christ, that monogram of the eternal mystery, is its completion. Here the rational are enfolded with non-rational elements, the revealed commingled with the unrevealed, the most exalted love with the most awe-inspiring 'wrath' of the numen, and therefore, in applying to the Cross of Christ the category of the 'holy,' Christian religious feeling has given birth to a religious intuition profounder and more vital than any to be found in the whole history of religion. 695

Otto rediscovered the religious nature of the Holy, as distinct from the ethical meanings that had often been associated with it. In doing so, he clearly underscored one strand of biblical tradition concerning the Holy, namely, its character as the 'wholly other.' However, inasmuch as his discussion centered on the subjective consciousness of the person, he

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692 Ibid., pp.117-35.

693 Ibid., pp.134-35.

694 Ibid., pp.170ff.

695 Ibid., p.173.

distanced himself from even this tradition, for in the priestly conception of the Holy the word often conveyed an objective meaning, as we have seen. The consequent sanctification of things, the material holiness of the cult, is quite foreign to Otto's thought. For this reason, von Rad concludes that the 'considerable body of Old Testament evidence concerning holiness reveals the limitations of the great work of Rudolf Otto, in which the holy is related much too one-sidedly to man and his soul.'<sup>696</sup> That Otto did not condone the materialization of the Holy, which Jesus later condemned, is certainly no flaw in his theology. The point is, however, that he dissolved the 'wholly other' into the consciousness of the perceiving subject in such a way that the objective nature of the Holy - the set-apartness extra nos - was almost completely done away with. Though the objectivity of Israel's cult often degenerated into a very static materialism, it did nevertheless maintain the separate distinctiveness of the Holy. The Holy is set apart - even from the human consciousness.

Even further removed is Otto from the ethical dimension of the Holy. Indeed, he consciously tried to distance himself from this. Yet, as was shown, this is eventually of great importance for biblical faith, especially in prophetic theology. Otto's phenomenological description of holiness established it as an independent, de-personalized category, quite apart from any specific religious faith, let alone any specific God. If he finally affirmed the superiority of Christianity, it was because, in his judgment, it best conformed to the specification of the Holy enabled by empirical

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696 von Rad, OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY - Vol.I, p.206.

analysis. But for Christian faith, the Holy is not an empty, independent category; it knows only the Holy One of Israel revealed in the Holy One of Nazareth. While there is always the 'wholly other' dimension of holiness in biblical faith, its separateness is filled-in, as it were, with a specific content: the 'otherness' of God is precisely his redemptive love. Abraham Heschel, a Jewish theologian, has accurately hit upon Otto's weakness:

The God of the prophets is not the wholly other, a strange, weird, uncanny Being, shrouded in unfathomable darkness, but the God of the covenant, whose will they know and are called upon to convey. The God they proclaim is not the Remote One, but the One who is invoked, near, and concerned. The Silent One may be the antithesis of man, but the prophecy is God meeting man. 697

b. While Otto has emphasized the religious nature of holiness, other theologians have stressed its moral character. Paul Tillich attributes the association of the Holy with the morally clean to the influence of Calvin and his followers.

An almost neurotic anxiety about the unclean develops in later Calvinism. The word 'Puritan' is most indicative of this trend. The holy is the clean; cleanliness becomes holiness. This means the end of the numinous character of the holy. The tremendum becomes fear of the law and of judgment; the fascinosum becomes pride of self-control and repression. 698

A glance at Heinrich Heppe's REFORMED DOGMATICS would confirm that some following in Calvin's train have indeed moved in the direction

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697 Abraham J. Heschel, THE PROPHETS (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1962), p.227.

698 Tillich, ST I, p.217.



indicated by Tillich.<sup>699</sup> However, we cannot accurately characterize this as a particularly Reformed approach to the Holy. As will be shown shortly in this chapter, Emil Brunner, P. T. Forsyth, and Karl Barth do not identify the Holy with the morally clean. Furthermore, a survey of standard dogmatic works shows the description of holiness in moral categories to be a tendency that cuts across denominational and theological lines.<sup>700</sup> It is present, as Tillich noted, in later Calvinism (with its concern for cleanliness), but also in the vastly different theological framework of the Ritschlian school of Liberal Theology (with its stress on the ethical).

In any event, the Holy has often been linked to notions of moral cleanliness; the prophetic-ethical conception of holiness stressed to the exclusion of the cultic-religious. Thus Clarke, for example, writes: ' . . . the doctrine of holiness is at the deepest a doctrine of absolute and perfect moral excellence.'<sup>701</sup> And Hall discusses holiness under the 'moral attributes' of God, defining it as his 'self affirming purity . . . freedom and separation from moral perfection.'<sup>702</sup>

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699 'MASTRICHT, (II,19,1): God's holiness is the "moral goodness by which God is at most imitable." - LEIDEN SYNOPSIS VI, 40: "It is holiness by which being most pure in Himself God approves all cleanness and abhors the contrary." - STAPPER sees in holiness absolute perfection or God's good pleasure init(I, 139): "God embraces all that can be conceived of perfection and indeed perfections alone with nothing diverse or contrary, all imperfection being excluded, and in this sense He is called holy . . ."' (Heinrich Heppe, REFORMED DOGMATICS, revised and ed. Ernst Bizer, trans. G. T. Thompson (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1950), p.92.).

700 See, e.g., Albert C. Knudson, THE DOCTRINE OF GOD (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1930), pp.335-36 (Methodist); Edward Arthur Litton, INTRODUCTION TO DOGMATIC THEOLOGY, ed. Philip E. Hughes (London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1960), p.71 (Anglican); Ernest Swing Williams, SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY - Vol.I (Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 1953), p.187 (Pentecostal).

701 William Newton Clarke, THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF GOD (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909). See also *ibid.*, pp.94-107 for an expansion of this idea.

702 Francis J. Hall, THEOLOGICAL OUTLINES, revised Frank Hudson Hallock (London: SPCK, 1934), p.90.



Certainly this understanding of holiness is consonant with part of the biblical witness. Moral cleanliness is connected with the Holy in both the priestly and prophetic literature. Yet, as we have attempted to demonstrate, it is not so to the exclusion of the religious dimension; the 'wholly other' aspect is never dissolved - not even in prophetic theology. Isaiah was overwhelmed with his own uncleanness, in the presence of awesome majesty describable only in the symbolic language of royalty ('upon a throne, high and lifted up . . . his train filled the temple'), angelic beings ('above him stood the seraphim'), and cataclysmic violence ('the foundations of the thresholds shook').<sup>703</sup> The 'woe is me!' of personal imperfection was experienced in the presence of the 'wholly other' One who was almost completely indescribable.

It is indeed unquestionable that the idea of the holy in reference to the concept of God strongly emphasizes also moral perfection. But as holiness is re-interpreted in the direction of morality, sin is likewise interpreted moralistically and loses its religious orientation. It is therefore, as has been stated, very important that holiness retain its original and purely religious meaning. Only when the separation between the divine and the human implied in holiness is given due consideration, and the divine is allowed to appear as unconditional majesty in relation to the human,

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703 Isaiah 6:1-4.

can holiness be of fundamental significance  
for the Christian conception of God. 704

c. By stressing either a purely religious or a purely ethical conception of holiness, such theologies find themselves in the untenable position of abstractly defining the being of God apart from his full, concrete revelation in Jesus Christ. Otto's mysterium tremendum was discovered by means of the empirical observation of the nature of religious experience in the presence of the 'wholly other.' The Holy, for him, is a general, a priori category, distinct from any of its specific manifestations in human history. Jesus Christ has significance for Otto because he instantiates and fills out a previously determined - hence, independent - category of holiness. But if Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate, the fullest and final self-revelation of God to humanity, then must we not judge all descriptions of the

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704 Gustaf Aulén, THE FAITH OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, trans. Eric H. Wahlstrom (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1960), p.103. See also Gustaf Aulén, THE DRAMA AND THE SYMBOLS - A BOOK ON THE IMAGES OF GOD AND THE PROBLEMS THEY RAISE, trans. Sydney Linton (London: SPCK, 1970), pp.107-109; Bertrand Brasnett, GOD THE WORSHIPFUL (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1935), p.104; and Jaroslav Pelikan, HUMAN CULTURE AND THE HOLY - ESSAYS ON THE TRUE, THE GOOD, AND THE BEAUTIFUL (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1959). In Pelikan's interesting study, six thinkers are discussed: Kierkegaard, Paul, Dostoevsky, Luther, Nietzsche, and Bach. Pelikan believes that 'in his own way each has pointed up one or another aspect of the relation between Christianity and the problem of value: either the impossibility of equating the Holy with one or another value, or the necessity of subjecting all values to the Holy. All of them were drawn to an equation of the Holy with human value, but all came to realize, with existential dread, that God cannot be domesticated in a value' (pp.viii-ix).

nature of God's being according to the knowledge of Christ, rather than gauge Christ by the measuring rod of an a priori standard somehow disclosed through human experience? Is not Otto's mysterium tremendum far removed from the God revealed in Jesus Christ?

Similarly, a one-sided emphasis on the ethical dimension of holiness is equally unacceptable, for it also abstractly defines God apart from his concrete revelation in Christ. When the being of God is defined by such terms as 'clean,' 'stainless purity,' 'moral goodness,' and others taken from the realm of human values, has not theology recast God into the human image, however many adjectives are employed to show that he is infinitely better? And however much such a God may help reinforce ethical values, is he not himself threatened by an ethical legalism - the laws of which are legislated and adjudicated by human experience? In that God has revealed himself in Jesus Christ, the event of revelation is an event of grace. Does this not mean, then, that God always stands over-against humankind, the 'wholly other' who because he is separate can give to it something it does not possess of itself, i.e., a true knowledge of the Holy?

Therefore, we must look for an understanding of holiness that is grounded in Jesus Christ. Inasmuch as both the 'religious' and the ethical dimensions of holiness find their unity in him, we cannot be satisfied with approaches which abstract one or the other apart from him.

Are there any guides with whom we may travel as we seek to reach a more Christocentric understanding of holiness? Fortunately, there are. We shall consider the ways taken by Emil Brunner, P. T. Forsyth, and Karl Barth, and hopefully they will together point out the road on which to continue our journey.

1. Emil Brunner recognized that 'in the Biblical revelation . . . we are concerned not with "the Holy" (as an abstract conception), but with the Holy One (as personal).'<sup>705</sup> Because the Holy One has revealed himself in Jesus Christ as a God of love, Brunner sought to grasp the dynamics of love and holiness, and to understand each in relation to the other.

Brunner begins his discussion of holiness with a grateful acknowledgement of Otto's work on the subject,<sup>706</sup> emphasizing that originally the word 'holy' had no ethical connotations.

Holiness is the Nature of God, that which distinguishes Him from everything else, the Transcendence of God in His very Nature, as the "Wholly Other" . . . . it is that which sets the Being of God apart from all other forms of being. 707

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705 Emil Brunner, THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF GOD: DOGMATICS - Vol.I, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1950), p.157.

706 Ibid.

707 Ibid., p.158.

Yet, inasmuch as the 'wholly other' is not an 'it' but an 'I', Brunner does not wish to let this definition of holiness stand as it is, for it is 'too static and too logical to give the full meaning of the Biblical word "holy."'<sup>708</sup> As personal, God is Will, and thus 'the Being of God which His Name makes known to us can never be grasped by neutral categories of existence.'<sup>709</sup>

The Holiness of God is therefore not only an absolute difference of nature, but it is an active self-determination, the willed energy with which God asserts and maintains the fact that He is Wholly Other against all else. 710

By introducing the notion of will, Brunner is thus able to account for the moral dimensions of the Holy, since it is God's will 'to be known by His creatures, and to possess them in a qualified sense as His own possession.'<sup>711</sup> Behind all moral law is simply this: 'You belong wholly and entirely to God.'<sup>712</sup> Herein is the 'original and natural unity'<sup>713</sup> of the Holy and the

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708 Ibid., p.159.

709 Ibid.

710 Ibid., p.160.

711 Ibid., p.165.

712 Ibid., p.166.

713 Ibid.

moral. For

wherever the will of God is known as the will of the Holy, as the will of the Lord and Creator who is bent upon asserting His right over us, there is no possibility of a conflict between the religious and moral elements. What God wills - the sovereignty of God - is the foundation of all true morality; conversely, all morality which is directed toward the good of our neighbour has its deepest motive in obedience to the Will of God. 714

Thus Brunner's thought accurately reflects both the religious ('wholly other') dimension and the ethical dimension present in the biblical concept of holiness. He has united these aspects under the idea of 'will.' Unfortunately, however, this unity begins to fall apart when he relates God's holiness to his love.

Brunner's intention is to keep both holiness and love grounded in the Christian conception of God, i.e., to understand both from the being of God revealed in Jesus Christ.<sup>715</sup> However, it is doubtful whether he really succeeds, for he never gets beyond what he terms 'the paradoxical dualism' of holiness and love.<sup>716</sup> What we would expect to find unified in the person of Christ, remains, for Brunner, distinctly separated. There is, he tells us,

a sharp and essential contrast; for Holiness creates distance, but love creates communion. Holiness erects barriers, love breaks through them. Holiness is the will which asserts its rights, and claims glory, recognition, sovereignty.

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714 Ibid., p.167.

715 Ibid., p.183.

716 Ibid.

The Holy God speaks thus: 'I will to have all for Myself; claim everything for Myself.' But love is the very opposite of all this. Love says: 'all for thee, nothing for me.' Love is surrender, sacrifice, renunciation of one's own claims, service. Above all, however, the contrast becomes clear when we look at Holiness in its negative form: as the wrath of God, which annihilates resistance, and finally crushes those who resist Him. This contrast must not be glossed over or weakened, for if we do either we make it impossible to understand either Holiness or Love. 717

Now, the difficulty with this position is that Brunner ends up, in effect, with two contrasting 'wills' in God: one will is exclusive (holiness); the other, inclusive (love).

It is true that he tries to resolve the difficulty by asserting that holiness is the presupposition of love, since only a God who is absolutely sovereign possesses the freedom to love unfathomably.<sup>718</sup> And further, he explains that as the Holy One, God wills that his holy will shall be realized in human creation. 'Thus God wills that the creature should become full of His own nature - and that is the same as His will to impart Himself, His love . . .'<sup>719</sup> But if Brunner means by this that the holiness of God is the maintenance and guarantee of the victory of his love, then why does he go to such lengths to contrast them? If the holy will of God is his love, there is no reason to set them in antithetical opposition. But clearly, whatever Brunner means, this cannot be what he has in mind, because holiness for him is first marked by exclusion, distance.

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717 Ibid., pp.188-89.

718 Ibid., p.189.

719 Ibid., p.190.

That Brunner does not adopt the full union of love and holiness may be due to the fact that he can speak of a "'God outside of Christ," the God whom we encounter in the natural sphere.'<sup>720</sup> Here holiness corresponds to the wrath of God under which the sinner stands, 'so long as he has not entered into the sphere of grace of Jesus Christ through revelation and faith.'<sup>721</sup> Thus Brunner conceives of a wrathful holiness, which is quite distinct from the reconciliation of God in Christ.

Can we really accept these distinctions? Are there really two different 'wills' in God, one for exclusion, the other for inclusion? Is there really a wrathful holiness alongside a loving holiness? Is there really a God outside of Christ as well as a God in Christ? If these distinctions are accepted, one is led, it seems, to an unacceptable division within God himself. Does not Brunner's position finally threaten the trinitarian understanding of God's being? For if God is eternally Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, can we ever know of a God outside of Jesus Christ without positing a break in the trinal unity of the divine being?

Therefore, we conclude that while Brunner correctly finds the religious and ethical dimensions of holiness in God, he does

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720 Ibid., p.173. See also Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, NATURAL THEOLOGY, trans. Peter Fraenkel (London: Geoffrey Bles: The Centenary Press, 1946), pp.15-60. where this notion emerges very clearly in his disagreement with Barth.

721 Brunner, THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF GOD: DOGMATICS - Vol.I, p.173.



not complete the process of unification by linking them together in a convincing way. Instead, by keeping them distinct, he leaves us with a tension - perhaps even a conflict? - within God himself.

2. A discussion of the various theological attempts at defining holiness should not neglect reference to P. T. Forsyth.<sup>722</sup>

'There is no one point at which Forsyth stood so alone as in his conscious, explicit relating of all doctrine to a fundamental understanding of God as holy.'<sup>723</sup> Unfortunately, however, though

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722 Unfortunately, this reference is often neglected. Strangely, P. T. Forsyth is generally overlooked by present day theological discussions. Yet his was a prophetic voice that still has a compelling contemporaneity for the modern reader. 'The truth is that, like Kierkegaard, Forsyth was a great man born before his time. In an era of prosperity before two World Wars had blown sky-high the secular dogma of inevitable progress, Forsyth did what Karl Barth, Reinhold Niebuhr and others did for us in an era of collapse and despair, but with this difference: whereas they were, partly at least, commenting on accomplished facts, Forsyth was "seeing the invisible." Now, at long last, his kairos has come' (A. M. Hunter, P. T. FORSYTH (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), pp.11-12). 'He anticipated much that was later developed by Karl Barth - the social and political realism of human sinfulness, the primacy of objective grace over subjective illumination, the intrinsic authority of the person of Christ, the power and finality of the Cross' (Alan Galloway, 'P. T. Forsyth,' THE EXPOSITORY TIMES 84 (Oct. 1972-Sept. 1973): 58).

723 John H. Rodgers, THE THEOLOGY OF P. T. FORSYTH - THE CROSS OF CHRIST AND THE REVELATION OF GOD (London: Independent Press, 1965), p.30. See also W. F. Bradley, P. T. FORSYTH - THE MAN AND HIS WORK (London: Independent Press, 1952), pp.113-38; Robert McAfee Brown, P. T. FORSYTH: PROPHET FOR TODAY (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1952), pp.75-78; Gwilym O. Griffith, THE THEOLOGY OF P. T. FORSYTH (London and Redhill: Lutterworth Press, 1948), pp.66-73.

the category of the Holy was the touchstone of his theology, 'he never attempted any constructive explication of this basic concept.'<sup>724</sup> We are left, therefore, with the task of inferring from his works why he believed that the holiness of God is the real foundation of religion . . . the ruling interest of the Christian religion.'<sup>725</sup> This task is complicated by the fact that Forsyth often wrote more like a preacher than a systematic theologian: his prose is cast in prophetic fire, marked by images and metaphors, more poetic than pedantic. The careful student of Forsyth will be cautious about making too much of any single phrase from Forsyth's pen, however apt and well-turned it may be. An understanding of Forsyth's theology comes after total immersion in it, when the poetic poundings of individual waves are finally gathered up in the deep vastness of the subject matter itself.

As an approach to Forsyth's understanding of holiness, let us consider a quotation from one of his sermons - a quotation that comes as close as any to summarizing his theology.

The divine Father is the holy. And the Holy Father's first care is holiness. The first charge on a Redeemer is satisfaction to that holiness. The Holy Father is one who does and must atone. Atonement wears a new glory when read in Christ's own light. We see it flowing in grief from that very holiness of the Father to which it returns in praise. 726

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724 Ibid., p.66.

725 P. T. Forsyth, THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS (London: Independent Press, 1909), p.23.

726 P. T. Forsyth, GOD THE HOLY FATHER (London: Independent Press, 1957), p.4.

There are two things to notice in this passage: first, holiness is related to the fatherhood of God; second, the reconciling work of Jesus Christ is the outworking of this holiness in relation to humanity.

Forsyth was concerned to counter certain aspects of nineteenth century liberalism, namely, the rather vague and sentimental emphasis on the fatherhood of God (with divine love conceived of as a sort of kindly pity) and 'the brotherhood of man.' The Consuming Fire had been domesticated, cooled to the temperature of a 'love slack and over-sweet.'<sup>727</sup> The answer, Forsyth felt, was not to abandon the idea of divine fatherhood, but rather to raise it to its true and full meaning: 'We make too little of the Father when we do not rise beyond love to grace - which is holy love, suffering hate and redeeming it.'<sup>728</sup> Thus, according to Forsyth, what is necessary is to see God anew as Holy Father.

In the face of God's holiness, humanity is shown to be unholy - sinful.

We put too little into fatherhood then if we treat it simply as boundless, patient, waiting, willing love . . . . It is not the father's sensitive love only that we have wounded, but His holy law. Man is not a mere runaway, but a rebel; not a pitiful coward, but a bold and bitter mutineer. . . 729

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727 Ibid.

728 Ibid., p.7.

729 Ibid., p.9.

This rebellious mutiny on the part of the creature requires judgment according to the 'law of holiness.' 'The enforcement of God's holiness by judgment is as essential to a universal and eternal Fatherhood as is the outflow of His love.'<sup>730</sup> This judgment took effect in Christ. It was not simply suffering that fell upon the Saviour, it was holy judgment. 'God in Christ judged sin as a Holy Father seeking penalty only for holiness' sake.'<sup>731</sup>

Does this mean, then, that Forsyth, like Brunner, understands holiness as something distinct from love? From the above, it might appear that such is the case. Even more is this so when we hear him say that 'you can go behind love to holiness, but behind holiness you cannot go.'<sup>732</sup> While recognizing a certain ambiguity and imprecision in his phraseology, I believe nonetheless that in the broader outlines of his thought as a whole he more closely links together the holiness and love of God than does Brunner. To see this, we must try to comprehend Forsyth's theology of atonement, a central theme in his thought.

The atonement, for Forsyth, is the act of God's holiness in relation to the sinner. Humankind's sin, that is, its unholiness, means it owes a debt - holiness. Only holiness itself can atone for the sin against holiness. Suffering alone is not holiness; it lacks final redemptive power. Only obedience, human holiness answering God's holiness, could pay the sinner's debt.

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730 Ibid., p.10.

731 Ibid.

732 Ibid., p.5.

There was owed that debt to holiness, that atonement to holiness which is so misconstrued when we make it due to justice or demanded by justice alone. Justice wants penalty, holiness wants holiness in the midst of penalty. It wants a soul's own perfect holiness in the midst of penalty due to other souls; it wants loving obedience amid the penalty of loveless defiance. 733

Since only an act of holiness - obedience - was able satisfactorily to answer God's holiness, only God could accomplish it. 'God alone could fulfil for us the holy law He never broke, and pay the cost He never incurred.'<sup>734</sup> 'If we could satisfy the moral order we disturbed, our insufferable self-satisfaction would derange it straightaway. We should be (as Luther said) "the proudest jackasses under heaven."<sup>735</sup> Because humans are helpless, perverted at the centre of their wills by sin, God alone is able to establish his holiness in the midst of his creation.

We should pause to note, at this point, that Forsyth has maintained adequately the aspect of 'otherness' that is part of the biblical idea of holiness. Holiness, even in the act of its establishment, is totally alien to the world: it comes from the 'wholly other,' not from within the creature himself. Thus the act and maintenance of holiness is grace, a gift from One distinct and separate in being from the being of sinful humanity. And herein is its connection with love. 'God's love is the outgoing of His holiness, not as exigent law, but as redeeming grace.' In other

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733 Ibid., p.11.

734 Ibid.

735 Ibid., pp.10-11.

words, holiness 'asserts itself in redeeming grace.'<sup>736</sup> Holiness is not something other than love; it is its ground and outworking. 'The holiness of God is the sum of all His action and relation to the world.'<sup>737</sup>

Though the act of holiness is completely God's act, and therefore grace, it is, all the same, humanity's act, too. For in Jesus Christ, and his death, we have to do not so much with substitutionary expiation as with 'solidary reparation.'<sup>738</sup> That is to say, as man, Jesus was more than a single individual; he was 'a Victor who had a capital solidarity with the race.'<sup>739</sup> In what did his victory consist? Just this: he lived a life of perfect obedience, and thus gave holy answer to the holiness of God. This is why the New Testament connects reconciliation with the blood of Christ, for the shedding of blood has reference to the outpouring of life.

It means something which touches the seat of life - as we might now say, puncture of the heart. It means the total surrender of a personality from its centre by the one means wherein personality both receives effect and produces effect - by means of a personal act of conquest which requires (but also releases) the whole resources of the personality. What God seeks is not religious tribute or present, costly or partial; His self-complete holiness requires, to meet and satisfy it, a total holy self, in a real act or deed of gift once for all, the absorption and oblation of the whole self in a crucial and objective achievement. 740

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736 P. T. Forsyth, POSITIVE PREACHING AND THE MODERN MIND, p.145.

737 P. T. Forsyth, THE WORK OF CHRIST (London: Independent Press, 1910), p.125.

738 Ibid., p.223.

739 Ibid., p.222.

740 Forsyth, THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS, p.87. For the New Testament linkage of reconciliation with the 'blood of Christ,' see I Peter 1:18-19 and Hebrews 9:22.

Thus the atonement was 'vindicative and not vindictive,'<sup>741</sup>  
 the re-establishment of holiness in the midst of the world. Christ's  
 obedience was both God's act for humanity and humanity's confession  
 before God.<sup>742</sup>

If we set this alongside the double aspect of holiness which  
 we have seen emerge from the biblical witness, it seems as if Forsyth  
 has come closer than Brunner to our goal: he has defined holiness  
 and its outworking in such a way that both its 'wholly other' and  
 its ethical characteristics are maintained. Because God alone is  
 holy, he alone is able to execute the holy act; atonement is  
 accomplished extra nos. Yet, inasmuch as that holy act was atonement,  
 the overcoming of the barriers created by sin, we see that it is not  
 something other than love, but is, in fact, the power of love, its  
 guarantee, the securing of its victory over the lovelessness of the  
 sinner. 'Holiness is that in the love of God which fixes it and

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741 Forsyth, THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS, p.98.

742 Forsyth's doctrine of reconciliation is remarkably  
 similar to that later developed by Karl Barth,  
 who also emphasized the twofold movement in  
 Christ: God toward humanity, and humanity  
 toward God. See esp. CD IV/1 and IV/2.  
 There are also resemblances in Forsyth's thought  
 to the earlier emphases of McLeod Campbell and  
 Horace Bushnell. See John McLeod Campbell,  
THE NATURE OF THE ATONEMENT AND ITS RELATION TO  
REMISSION OF SINS AND ETERNAL LIFE (London:  
 Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1855), and Horace Bushnell,  
THE VICARIOUS SACRIFICE - GROUNDED IN PRINCIPLES OF  
UNIVERSAL OBLIGATION (London: Richard D. Dickson,  
 1880).

assures it for ever. If holiness fail not, then love cannot'<sup>743</sup> - and holiness cannot fail because it is the innermost nature of God himself, that which sets him apart from all others. Reconciliation, then, is not love's triumph over holiness, the victory of God in Christ over the 'God outside Christ,' but is the event of holiness itself, the victory of holy love. Salvation means that God gains his victory over against me (he is eternally the 'wholly other'), which is nothing other than the revelation of the fact that he is wholly for me.

3. This same identification of holiness with love is re-stated in the theology of Karl Barth, with the lingering ambiguities still occasionally present in Forsyth's thought completely swept away. Though we shall consider Barth's theology in more detail later in this chapter, it is appropriate to consider his specific handling of the subject of God's holiness at this point, for it is the follow-through, as it were, of the christological approach to holiness. The linkage between holiness and love, which Brunner sought to come to terms with, but without success, and which Forsyth united, though not without ambiguity, Barth grasped and clarified. Here is the essence of what he has to say on the subject:

If God's love is what is revealed to us in Jesus Christ, if Jesus Christ Himself is the revealed love of God, there is an end of the divorce between God's grace and holiness, and there remains to us only the recognition and adoration of Him who is both gracious and holy: gracious as He is holy and holy as he is gracious. 744

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743 Forsyth, GOD THE HOLY FATHER, p.26.

744 Barth, CD II/1, p.367



What Barth is saying is this: holiness is grace. When we speak of holiness 'we are merely continuing to speak of God's grace.'<sup>745</sup> Thus the holy God of Scripture is not 'the holy' of Rudolf Otto, but the Holy One of Israel. 'The Israelites will hold his name holy because they will see what His hands have done for them (Is. 29<sup>23</sup>).' This means that 'holiness could obviously stand for grace, since it characterizes God as Him who is and acts for Israel.'<sup>746</sup>

But of course the full revelation of the fact that God is both gracious and holy comes to us in Jesus Christ. In him we see the unity of grace and judgment.

That God is gracious does not mean that He surrenders Himself to the one to whom He is gracious. He neither compromises with his resistance, nor ignores it, still less calls it good. But as the gracious God He affirms Himself over against the one to whom He is gracious by opposing and breaking down his resistance, and in some way causing His own good will to exert its effect upon him. Therefore the one to whom He is gracious comes to experience God's opposition to him. 747

Because humanity is sinful, God's grace reveals itself in judgment; it is active opposition over against the creature. But since it is judgment in Christ, it is also grace. Thus God's assertion of his will, the maintenance of his 'wholly other-ness' is exactly the overcoming of the barrier between the sinner and himself by grace. 'The holiness of God consists in the unity of His judgment with His grace. God is holy because His grace judges and His judgment is gracious.'<sup>748</sup>

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745 Ibid., p.359.

746 Ibid., p.361.

747 Ibid.

748 Ibid., p.363.

In that his grace judges, he remains forever distinct, set-apart and set-over-against humanity; yet because his holy will is accomplished in Christ, his judgment is gracious. Thus do holiness and love merge together in Jesus Christ.

4. What, then, is the Holy? Biblically, it has two aspects: complete 'otherness,' as is seen in the original 'religious' use of the word, and mercy, as shown in the 'ethical' application of the word. These two strands are not mutually exclusive; quite the contrary. As the concept of holiness developed, they merged to the extent that the holy-profane antithesis came to consist fully in the overcoming of the antithesis. This overcoming found its fulfilment in Jesus Christ. In him, love and holiness coalesce. In the unity of his act of grace and judgment, God's 'otherness' asserts itself without compromise - an 'otherness' which is nothing other than love.

We have, therefore, in the Holy a concept which describes the distinct being of God as a being-in-relationship-with-the-world. That God is holy means that he is 'wholly other' because he is wholly for us; separate precisely in his overcoming of the divine-human separation.

The Holy is 'the great stranger in the human world, that is, a datum of experience which can never really be co-ordinated into the world in which man is at home.'<sup>749</sup> Over against the self-centered drive for personal autonomy and lordship, which marks human sin, stands the absolute contrast of the Holy: the self-sacrificing love of God.<sup>750</sup> Nels Ferré is correct when he points out that

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749 von Rad, OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY - Vol.I, p.205.

750 See Chapter VI for a fuller discussion of the relationship between holiness and sin.

holiness receives its meaning precisely in relation to that which is not holy, and thus needs to be separated from it. Holiness, therefore, always involves a negative relation, but its definition must ever be in terms of God's love, of ultimate truth as such . . . . Holiness is love's negative work in relation to sin.<sup>751</sup> Inasmuch, however, as the content of that 'negative work' is love, holiness is negative only to the extent that it is also positive. When set in relation to humanity's sinful resistance, holiness is a negative work; yet, because it is the overcoming of that resistance, it is fully positive. It is negative because it is positive and positive because it is negative.

In OUR KNOWLEDGE OF GOD, John Baillie questioned whether Otto and others were correct in their acceptance of God as 'wholly other':

The reason why it is difficult to regard the relation of man to God as merely a relationship between two beings who stand over against each other (and are in that sense wholly other) is that God appears in some sort to be present on both sides of the relationship. When I respond to God's call, the call is God's and the response is mine; and yet the response is God's too; for not only does He call me in His grace, but also by His grace brings the response to birth within my soul. 752

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751 Nels F. S. Ferré, THE CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF GOD (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1951), p.116. Ferré (ibid., p.115) approvingly quotes H. R. Mackintosh: "'to assert unflinchingly that love and holiness are one in God, despite their seeming antagonism, is as much the business of a true theology as to assert that deity and manhood are one in Christ'" (H. R. Mackintosh, TYPES OF MODERN THEOLOGY - SCHLEIERMACHER TO BARTH (London: Nisbet, 1939), p.159).

752 John Baillie, OUR KNOWLEDGE OF GOD (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp.233-34.

Baillie's criticism may bear some relevance to Otto's mysterium tremendum, but it fails to account for the fact that the God revealed in Jesus Christ is 'wholly other' precisely in his grace which both calls and effectually quickens the human response. What is necessary is not to abandon the 'wholly other' aspect of God's holiness, but to understand it aright. As holy, God is ontologically distinct from the world because he is distinctly for the world.

### C. The Advance

(1) Our first advance against the trend toward the loss of ontological distinction between the Church and the world in twentieth century theology, must be directed against the immanentalism of Bonhoeffer and Tillich. To arm ourselves for the engagement, let us take up 'the idea of the Holy.'

a. What does the holiness of God mean for the incarnational immanentalism of Dietrich Bonhoeffer? It was Bonhoeffer's concern to understand and explicate the full implications of the incarnation of the Son of God. Since he believed that this event signified that God has entered fully into our space and time, he sought to define the place of Christ in the world. As we have seen, it is this quest that caused the far-reaching development of his thought as he followed out the logic of the communicatio idiomatum of Lutheran theology.

Now we ask: What does it mean that the Incarnate One is the Holy One? Is it possible to assert, with Bonhoeffer, that, because of the incarnation, the Holy and the profane have become one reality?

If the above exegetical and theological arguments about the nature of the Holy are correct, then Bonhoeffer's position proves untenable, for in the event of Jesus Christ the holiness of God is fulfilled in the midst of creation. In this event of holiness God reveals himself as a being wholly distinct from us because he is a being wholly for us. The structure of grace in Jesus Christ is such that it forever maintains this dialectic. That God bridged

the chasm which sin created between himself and the world, Bonhoeffer clearly perceived; but what his later theology tended to overlook is that God's bridging the gap does not close all distances so that the two become one in undifferentiated unity. In fact, it is this action itself which establishes what T. F. Torrance terms a 'proper dualism',<sup>753</sup> between God and the world, for what was established in Christ is a divine-human fellowship shaped according to the structure of grace. Because God reconciles humanity to himself, and not vice versa, a definite relationship is created. God is the benefactor; the sinner the grateful beneficiary. Can we ever speak, then, of God and the world becoming one reality - without completely distorting this structure of grace?<sup>754</sup>

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753 Torrance, SPACE, TIME AND INCARNATION, p.72.

754 Cf. J. G. Davies, EVERY DAY GOD - ENCOUNTERING THE HOLY IN WORLD AND WORSHIP (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1973). In a way similar to Bonhoeffer, Davies emphasizes the incarnation and seeks to interpret holiness in its light. Thus he sees Christ as a 'model' of the Holy. '1. In Christ the holy is embodied in man in all his human perfection. 2. As each man realizes his potentialities and approaches nearer to his own human perfection, he is approaching the condition of Christ. 3. Hence, since the Incarnation, man, in order to find the holy, needs to do nothing else than become a fully mature human being' (pp.94-95). Or, as he states it in another place, 'the New Testament writers make it clear that the holy is not separate from the human, that there is no gulf between the divine and man, and that the holy indeed confronts us with nothing alien to ourselves but with our own humanity' (p.74). Davies clearly reveals the outcome of the tendencies which have been traced in Bonhoeffer's later thought, and the criticisms made of Bonhoeffer can be quite appropriately directed against him.

In his book SPACE, TIME AND INCARNATION, T. F. Torrance presents a view of the incarnation which adequately preserves the dialectic of the Holy. The incarnation, he believes, is the event in which 'the Son of God has become man without ceasing to be the God He ever was, and that after the Incarnation He is at work within space and time in a way that He never was before.'<sup>755</sup> In order to explain this, Torrance refers to the creation of the universe ex nihilo, a doctrine which 'implies the absolute priority of God over space and time, for space and time were produced along with the creaturely world as orderly functions of contingent events within it.'<sup>756</sup> This means that 'God stands in a transcendent and creative, not a spatial or temporal relation to the creaturely world.'<sup>757</sup> He is free from any necessity in the relation with creation.<sup>758</sup> In the incarnation God assumes the rationality of created truth. The Son of God enters the realms of space and time and 'makes them His own although He is distinct from them.'<sup>759</sup>

To show how we may understand God as transcendentally free in relation to the creation, without turning his freedom into an arbitrary inscrutability, Torrance introduces the concept of an 'infinite differential':

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755 Torrance, SPACE, TIME AND INCARNATION, p.53.

756 Ibid., p.60.

757 Ibid.

758 Ibid., p.65.

759 Ibid.

Considered in itself, then, there is only the world, this world that has come into being, but considered from the side of God's creation it is only one of all possible worlds. Thus we must think of God's relation to the world in terms of an infinite differential, but we must think of the world's relation to God in terms of a created necessity in which its contingency is not negated. 760

In the incarnation God interacts with the world, making created time and space the 'chosen path' of his rationality, establishing time and space as the sphere of his relations with us; yet, because of his infinite freedom, he is not limited by creation.<sup>761</sup>

Therefore, we must reject the 'radical dualism' which conceives of a 'deistic disjunction' between God and the world, for God has freely created this world and assumed for himself its structures of rationality. On the other hand, however, 'there can be no resolving of divine transcendence into this worldly transcendence or any merging of the divine reality and this worldly reality on the same horizontal level.'<sup>762</sup> The 'proper dualism,' according to Torrance, is best conceptualized by the image of a vertical axis (divine reality) intersecting the horizontal plane of this-worldly reality. Jesus Christ is the 'place' where the vertical and horizontal dimensions intersect, for God has established him as the place where he 'meets with man in the actualities of his human existence, and man meets with God and knows Him in His own divine Being.'<sup>763</sup> Thus

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760 Ibid., p.66.

761 Ibid., p.67.

762 Ibid., p.72.

763 Ibid., p.75.



the transcendent God is present and immanent within this world in such a way that we encounter His transcendence in this-worldly form in Jesus Christ, and yet in such a way that we are aware of a majesty of transcendence in Him that reaches out infinitely beyond the whole created order. 764

Torrance has used very different language than we have employed in our discussion of holiness, but even so, has he not presented a view of the incarnation which more accurately reflects the biblical view of holiness than did Dietrich Bonhoeffer? For all his concern to understand fully God's involvement in the world, Bonhoeffer allowed the transcendence of God to 'flatten-out' into a wholly this-worldly reality. In so doing, he violated the 'wholly other' nature of the Holy. By use of geometrical imagery, Torrance has shown that we can maintain both the transcendental freedom of God and his this-worldly involvement - both of which find their unity in Jesus Christ. To take up again the terminology of this chapter, in Jesus Christ there exists the unity of the 'wholly other' and the 'wholly for' aspects of holiness, for the two are revealed as one and the same in the being of God.

b. If the concept of the Holy forces us to part company with the incarnational immanentalism of the later Bonhoeffer, it also separates us from the abstract transcendentalism of Paul Tillich. For the 'otherness' of the Holy One means that he is absolutely

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764 Ibid., p.79. See also T. F. Torrance, 'The Relation of the Incarnation to Space in Nicene Theology,' in THE ECUMENICAL WORLD OF ORTHODOX CIVILIZATION - Vol.III, ed. Andrew Blane (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1973), pp.43-70.

free from all rationalistic conceptions, however exaltedly he may be set upon the heights (or into the depths) of being. And yet, inasmuch as the transcendent 'otherness' of the Holy One is his freedom for this world, the knowledge of God is a given reality to human experience. In the revelation of himself, God fully binds himself to the world by a loving self-surrender which is exactly that which sets him apart from it. Inherent within the notion of the holiness of God, therefore, is the fact that humanity is completely other than God (thus incapable of rationally taking hold of him), and yet dependent on that very 'otherness' for the knowledge of him. That God does reveal himself, and that humankind does receive knowledge of his being, does not mean the dissolution of ontological distinction between them; rather, it reveals it in its fulness.

Karl Heim clearly articulated the choice before us when he wrote:

The bare emergence of the Idea of God confronts us with an ultimate Either-Or. Either our Forms of Intuition and Forms of Thought have final validity for the understanding of Reality, and then we must either interpret the Idea of God in the way Idolatry does, by giving absolute value to some only relative reality, or, as Pantheism does, by deifying the infinite Whole of things; or, on the other hand, God is the ens realissimum, and then our intramundane Forms of Intuition have the effect of veiling the ultimate depths of the 'I', the 'Thou', and the World, because God, the Giver of all existence, cannot be apprehended in these Forms . . . .

If God is a Reality and not to be explained away in the manner of Idolatry and Pantheism, then it is impossible for us, by any observation or any thinking of our own, to reach what He is and what He wills. We are thrown back on God's own revelation. 765

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765 Karl Heim, GOD TRANSCENDENT - FOUNDATION FOR A CHRISTIAN METAPHYSIC, trans. Edgar Primrose Dickie, revised Edwyn Bevan (London: Nisbet, 1935), p.231.

In Paul Tillich's system we have a theology developed on the basis of Heim's first choice. By relying on 'our Forms of Intuition and Forms of Thought,' Tillich defined God in a way which fully intended to protect his transcendental 'otherness,' but a way doomed to failure from the beginning. For as long as God remains imprisoned in the rationalistic structures of human thought, he is indistinguishable from the human mind, having been made a captive of its finitude. Such a 'God' is definitely not the Holy One revealed in Christ. Because He is Holy he remains forever distinct from created reality, including human thought processes. Yet, because his distinctiveness is, in fact, the impartation of himself to this world, he is really knowable, comprehensible. Because he is 'wholly other' than us, we are totally dependent on what he reveals to us of himself; because his 'otherness' consists in the fact that he is 'wholly for' us, we are able to know and apprehend his being. Such is the revelatory dialectic of holiness.

(2) The criticisms levelled against Bonhoeffer and Tillich in this chapter have been based upon a biblical and theological analysis of holiness. Accordingly, we have been led to advance an onset against the immanentism which developed as a consequence of the work of both of these theologians. In the ensuing foray, have we been alone? Have we represented a position defended by the solitary (and inadequate) forces of our own intellect? Or have there been allies, silently in reserve, as it were, until called upon to lend support?

To conclude this chapter, we shall call upon the considerable theological forces of Karl Barth. We turn to Karl Barth at this juncture, not because we have been labouring to set him up as the answer to all theological problems of the twentieth century, but rather for two reasons: first, any study which attempts to understand this century's theological movements, as we have tried to do, simply cannot ignore Karl Barth; and second, it is our judgment that he represents a viable theological alternative to those approaches discussed at length in the preceding chapters of this thesis - a theology, moreover, which more adequately expresses the biblical sense of God's holiness.

Barth's significance for twentieth century theology has been universally acknowledged by friend and foe alike. For the student of theology, there is no way around the work of Barth - only through it, 'for the contribution of Karl Barth to theology is, like that of Albert Einstein to natural science, so deep-going and fundamental that it marks one of the great eras of advance in the whole history of the subject.'<sup>766</sup> 'The theology of the twentieth century began with Karl Barth.'<sup>767</sup>

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766 Thomas F. Torrance, KARL BARTH - AN INTRODUCTION TO HIS EARLY THEOLOGY, 1910-1931 (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1962), p.9.

767 Zahrnt, THE QUESTION OF GOD, p.15.

a. Though Barth did not often write directly about holiness, his whole theological development may well be described as a theology of the Holy. As indicated earlier in this chapter, the Holy has two aspects: it designates the complete separation between God and the world, and locates the divine distinctiveness in God's self-giving love. The 'wholly other' is the 'wholly for'; early in his career, Barth set about to understand the former, and as his thought developed, he worked out more fully the implications of the latter. Both were present in the beginning, and both at the end; yet, in emphasis he clearly moved from the 'otherness' of God's grace to the 'otherness' of God's grace.

From his first book to the last fragment of the CHURCH DOGMATICS, there is present on every page the unifying theme which Barth holds closest to his heart: 'the powerful and yet not overpowering supremacy of God.'<sup>768</sup> Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in his early works, especially his first book; THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.<sup>769</sup> With prophetic force, this commentary plants the reader 'face to face with Almighty God in his infinite Majesty and Holiness and incredible, inscrutable Grace.'<sup>770</sup>

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768 Hans Küng, JUSTIFICATION - THE DOCTRINE OF KARL BARTH AND A CATHOLIC REFLECTION, trans. Thomas Collins, et. al. (London: Burns and Oates, 1964), p.29.

769 Karl Barth, THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS, trans. Edwin C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933; paperback reprint, 1976). This translation is of the sixth edition, which is virtually unchanged from the second edition.

770 Torrance, KARL BARTH, p.50.

From beginning to end, the book's concern is this: Let God be God, and let the creature learn to stay in his rightful place. Thus he writes:

if I have a system, it is limited to a recognition of what Kierkegaard called the 'infinite qualitative distinction' between time and eternity, and to my regarding this as possessing negative as well as positive significance: 'God is in heaven, and thou art on earth.' 771

With the conviction of a complete diastasis between God and the world, Barth hammers away against the nineteenth century's subjectivism, particularly as it was exemplified in Schleiermacher.<sup>772</sup> Torrance has described well the situation confronting the young pastor of Safenwil, Switzerland, as he sought to come to terms with the Apostle Paul and the contemporary meaning of his words:

Throughout all the tradition of the nineteenth century as it spilled over into the twentieth there was a morbid disease: modern philosophy and theology suffered from a cancerous subjectivism. Like a sheep overwhelmed in the snowdrift trying to keep itself alive by feeding upon his

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771 Barth, ROMANS, p.10.

772 See, e.g., Schleiermacher, THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, p.17: 'If, however, word and idea are always originally one, and the term "God" therefore presupposes an idea, then we shall simply say that this idea, which is nothing more than the expression of the feeling of absolute dependence, is the most direct reflection upon it and the most general idea with which we are here concerned, and is quite independent of that original knowledge (properly so-called), and conditioned only by our feeling of absolute dependence. So that in the first instance God signifies for us simply that which is the co-determinant in this feeling and to which we trace our being in such a state; and any further content of the idea must be evolved out of this fundamental import assigned to it.'

own ideas. What he needed above all was to break through to concrete relations with the living God. 773

The Christianity of Barth's day had read the Gospel backwards, for instead of taking the way from God to the world (as did Calvin and Kierkegaard) it reversed the Gospel of election, with its prius of divine grace, and had sought to journey along a private road from the depths of human experience to God.<sup>774</sup> But because 'one can not speak of God simply by speaking of man in a loud voice,'<sup>775</sup> Barth endeavoured to reverse this whole approach, in order to let the Word take with us the way it had originally taken in the incarnation. As Zahrnt graphically puts it,

Barth literally stood the theology of the nineteenth century on its head, turning it upside down. His way did not lead from below to above, but from above to below. God is simultaneously the subject and predicate of his theology. Thus Barth carried out a vast rearrangement of the entire theological furnishings, provided one

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773 Torrance, KARL BARTH, p.31.

774 Ibid.

775 Karl Barth, THE WORD OF GOD AND THE WORD OF MAN, trans. Douglas Horton (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1928), p.196.

may call rearrangement a process which turns the whole house upside down. 776

This 'rearrangement' began with Barth's constant stress on the fact that God is totaliter aliter. The Gospel he heard proclaimed by the Apostle's pen in Romans was of a 'God utterly distinct from men. Salvation comes to them from Him, because they are, as men, incapable of knowing Him.'<sup>777</sup> That we are able to see what eye hath not seen and hear what ear hath not heard is because of Jesus Christ. He is the Gospel of God. 'In His name two worlds meet and go apart, two planes intersect, the one known and the other unknown.'<sup>778</sup> Therefore one can speak of the

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776 Zahrnt, THE QUESTION OF GOD, p.38. For this reason, Zahrnt believes that Barth is still fundamentally a child of the nineteenth century in that he is still dominated by its questions (ibid., p.39). So also Gustaf Wingren, THEOLOGY IN CONFLICT, trans. Eric Wahlstrom (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1958), p.34: 'It is strange that we must make this statement, but it is necessary: in Barth's theology man is the obvious center. The question about man's knowledge is the axis around which the whole subject matter moves.' But these criticisms hardly commend themselves as accurate interpretations of Barth. For is it not the case that if one is attacking a particular position - anthropocentricity, let us say - one begins by dealing with the same questions that led one's opponents to adopt it in the first place? Otherwise, one would never really be speaking to the issues that concern them, let alone offering different answers in order to move them to a different position.

777 Barth, ROMANS, p.28. See also THE WORD OF GOD AND THE WORD OF MAN, p.74: God 'cannot be grasped, brought under new management, and put to use; he cannot serve. He must rule. He must himself grasp, seize, manage, use. He can satisfy no other needs than his own. He is not in another world over against this one; he submerges all of this in the other. He is not a thing among other things, but the wholly other, the infinite, aggregate of all merely relative others.'

778 Barth, ROMANS, p.29.



unspeakable and conceive the inconceivable - but only because God has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. And inasmuch as he has provided the knowledge of himself, he maintains his absolute priority.

In order to shatter the axiom of the basic continuity between the Creator and the creature, and yet to affirm humanity as fully as God affirmed it in Jesus Christ, Barth's theology took dialectical form.<sup>779</sup> This theological method was but the attempt to echo the Yes and the No which was spoken in Christ. Since the Yes of God was grace, it was therefore also judgment (No) against the sinner. That meant for Barth that one had constantly both to affirm and to negate, though perhaps the No needed to be sounded with greater volume in an age that needed to hear again of the diastasis between the divine and human. 'God is Yes in its fulness; it is only in order that we may understand him as God that we must pass through his No.'<sup>780</sup> Thus the agenda was set for a time that had failed to 'let God be God' and had instead dissolved his deity in anthropocentric experience. Accordingly, Barth set before his readers, with the fire of an Old Testament prophet, the 'wholly other,' the Holy.

Yet the 'wholly other' to whom Barth pointed was definitely not the 'wholly other' of Rudolf Otto. He had an objectivity apart

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779 Torrance, KARL BARTH, p.85.

780 Barth, THE WORD OF GOD AND THE WORD OF MAN, pp.120-21.

from human experience. 'In Biblical experience nothing is less important than experience as such.'<sup>781</sup> The 'wholly other' is as objective as Jesus Christ. In him the Gott-Mensch antithesis is both revealed and overcome; the transcendental intersects the horizontal; the divine encounters the human; God's judgment against is revealed in his grace for. 'It is knowing how merciful he is that keeps us aware how holy he is, how terrible he is in his holiness.'<sup>782</sup> The 'wholly other' proclaimed in the Gospel has fully entered our reality; but inasmuch as he meets us in the grace (and therefore judgment) of Jesus Christ, he remains distinctly other, even in his closeness.

That there was a certain turning-point in Barth's theology has been generally recognized.<sup>783</sup> What change there was, though, should be seen not so much as a break but as an expanding development with corresponding changes in terminology and emphasis. The primacy of God, his absolute sovereignty, was a constant theme for Barth throughout his theological career,<sup>784</sup> but, in Zahrnt's words,

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781 Ibid., p.69.

782 Ibid., p.171.

783 See, e.g., Colm O'Grady, THE CHURCH IN THE THEOLOGY OF KARL BARTH (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968) p.34; Torrance, KARL BARTH, pp.136, 182; Zahrnt, THE QUESTION OF GOD, p.88.

784 Wingren believes the divine-human antithesis in Barth is 'the most interesting part of his dogmatics. From this point of view the difference between earlier and later parts of Barth's theological production appear insignificant' (Wingren, THEOLOGY IN CONFLICT, p.23).

'the zeal of a prophet . . . [became] the zeal of an evangelist.'

<sup>785</sup>

If the early 'crisis theology' of Barth employed the dialectical method in order to set apart heaven and earth, this evolved into a 'theology of the Word' in which the emphasis shifted from diastasis to analogy. That is to say, Barth began with the negative clearing away of anthropocentric presuppositions in order to 'let God be God,' and as he thought out more fully the implications of the fact that this 'wholly other' is the One revealed in Christ, he turned to the task of understanding the positive significance of this revelation. Theology became for him the careful description of its one object: Jesus Christ. The grace of God in Jesus Christ became his starting-point and constant concern. Believing that Jesus Christ is the 'alpha and omega' of God's ways with humanity, he sought to understand the being of God and the meaning of human life from the concrete name of Jesus Christ. 'If ever solus Christus applied to any theology, it applies to Barth's CHURCH DOGMATICS: here we are as it were surrounded by Jesus Christ on every side.'

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Thus, all things are worked out by analogy from the grace of God in Christ.

It should be noted, however, that the centrality of grace was present at the beginning of his work, and the supremely free God still retained the place of priority at the end. Even in the 'crisis theology,' Barth's 'deepest intention was to point to the

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<sup>785</sup> Zahrnt, THE QUESTION OF GOD, p.88.

<sup>786</sup> Ibid., p.94.

crisis for the sake of pointing to the grace of God, to speak the No for the sake of making the divine Yes heard.'<sup>787</sup> And yet, for all the identification God makes with humanity, the event of Jesus Christ is the event of grace, and therefore God maintains his freedom over against humanity even in his effective union with it. As the theology of Barth developed into its full fruition in his magnum opus, the CHURCH DOGMATICS, it maintained throughout its stress on the complete freedom of grace revealed in Christ. All things - creation, justification, sanctification, redemption - flow from the free gift of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore Barth vigorously opposed any diminution of the doctrine of election. God, and God alone, saves. As Torrance writes,

the critical test Barth proposes to apply to theology is: How far does it give central expression to predestination in its idea of God? How far is the material content of theology built around the absolute prius of God's grace? How far does it really repose on the ultimate objectivity of God himself? Unless predestination is set at the very summit of all our thinking, then that thinking has no ultimate meaning beyond itself in God, but can only run to ground upon itself. If we do not realize that the best thought of God we can produce may not point to God but to the devil, if we imagine that we can grasp God through some extremely acute and pious correlation of the concepts of Being and Thought, or Fate or Idea, if we attempt to work out our knowledge into a self-contained system, if we think we have grasped the Spirit by our word, and the Word by our spirit, if we make out of predestination a harmless little comment on the appropriation of salvation, then our

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787 G. C. Berkouwer, THE TRIUMPH OF GRACE IN THE THEOLOGY OF KARL BARTH, trans. Harry R. Boer (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1956), p.33.

thinking may well be suspect of being but human speculation about God, that is, an act of self-justification on our part setting aside the free, undeserved grace of God. 788

For this reason Barth vigorously opposed any notion that conceivably opened the way for human self-salvation.<sup>789</sup> Thus it is against this background we should understand his rejection of the genus majestaticum of the Lutheran doctrine of the communicatio idiomatum<sup>790</sup> - a theological tenet of crucial importance for the development of Bonhoeffer's thought, as was shown.<sup>791</sup>

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788 Torrance, KARL BARTH, p.170. So also does von Balthasar see predestination as that which 'seems to hold the key to his whole theology' (von Balthasar, THE THEOLOGY OF KARL BARTH, trans. John Drury (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), p.155). For the full development of Barth's doctrine of election, see CD II/2.

789 As, e.g., the analogia entis of Roman Catholicism. See Barth CD II/2, pp.530ff. By affirming a natural analogy between the being of God and the being of humanity Roman Catholicism has, in Barth's view, undermined the reality of grace. In speaking of God, we certainly employ analogy, but it is the analogia fidei, that which faith receives through the Word of God. For a Roman Catholic response to this view, see Henri Bouillard, THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD, trans. Samuel D. Femiano (London: Burns and Oates, 1969).

790 'But where does the way through this door lead? It obviously leads smoothly and directly to anthropology: and not to a dull naturalistic and moralistic anthropology, but to a "high-pitched" anthropology; to a doctrine of a humanity which is not only capable of deification but already deified, or at any rate on the point of apotheosis or deification. If the supreme achievement of Christology, its final word, is the apotheosised flesh of Jesus Christ, omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient, deserving of our worship, is it not merely the hard shell which conceals the sweet kernel of the divinity of humanity as a whole and as such, a shell which we can confidently discard and throw away once it has performed this service? (CD IV/2, pp.81-82.)

791 See Chapter I.

Just as Barth feared may happen when this doctrine is accepted, Bonhoeffer ended with a theology which seriously blurred the distinction between God and humanity. Given the one reality of God and the world which Bonhoeffer believed to be the consequence of the incarnation, he was forced to understand this world's present godlessness as the very experience of God himself in the suffering of the crucifixion of his Son. Thus he hoisted up humanity to the place of Christ upon the cross, and in so doing threatened to undermine the vicarious nature of Christ's work of grace extra nos. We were thus compelled to question whether in Bonhoeffer's theology the creature does not perhaps achieve his own reconciliation with the Creator.

Does it not seem, therefore, that Barth's approach more effectively reflects the biblical meaning of holiness? At no point does he let slip away the distinction between God and the world. Even in the incarnation, where the divine and human were fully united, Barth sees the act of a sovereign God who is free in his judging grace and gracious judgment. Because of his 'unparalleled christological concentration,'<sup>792</sup> Barth maintained the dialectic of the Holy: the 'wholly other' is distinct from all other reality in that he is 'wholly for.'

b. Barth's strict focus on the concrete revelation of God in Jesus Christ also prevented him from being led into an abstract transcendentalism like that of Paul Tillich's. Like Barth,

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792 Zahrnt, THE QUESTION OF GOD, p.94.

Tillich was concerned to protect the deity of God, to preserve his freedom in the face of all human conceptions which reduced him to one being alongside others. To escape this sort of reductionism, Tillich defined God as 'being-itself.' As was shown,<sup>793</sup> this transcendental abstraction resulted in an immanentism of perhaps even greater proportions than Bonhoeffer's. Thus, by searching for the most all-inclusive concept (to protect the transcendence of God over all other beings), Tillich ironically lost the divine transcendence altogether by means of an abstraction.

By contrast, the 'wholly other' of Barth is not the highest entity conceivable by means of human reason. He is the Holy God who, being absolutely separate and therefore free even from human thought, has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. He is not a being 'behind Christ; not the all-inclusive 'being-itself.' His being (in all its 'otherness') is given to human apprehension in Christ.

Therefore, the doctrine of revelation is no minor concern for Barth, but to his mind central to the theological task of understanding the being of God. Revelation, according to Barth, is the self-interpretation of God. It is not something alongside of God, as for example, an autobiographical volume given as a gift from its author to a reader (and thus independent of the author); rather, it is the being of God in its self-manifestation. 'In God's

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793 See Chapter II.

revelation God's Word is identical with God Himself.'<sup>794</sup> In revelation 'reposes and lives' the fulness of the original self-existent being of God.<sup>795</sup>

Revelation then becomes the 'root' of the doctrine of the Trinity,<sup>796</sup> for the Trinity is the interpretation of the event of revelation and therewith the being of God.<sup>797</sup> The complete revelation is 'God in unimpaired unity, who according to the biblical understanding of revelation is the revealing God and the event of revelation and its effect on man.'<sup>798</sup> Thus God, in complete identity with his Word of revelation, is manifest in the unity of being which is also the 'unimpaired differentiation within Himself [ of ] this threefold mode of being.'<sup>799</sup> God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. 'God is subject, predicate, and object of the revelation-event.'<sup>800</sup>

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794 Barth, CD I/1, p.304.

795 Ibid., p.305.

796 Ibid., pp.304ff.

797 I am much indebted in the pages that follow to Eberhard Jüngel's excellent study of Barth's doctrine of the Trinity. See Eberhard Jüngel, THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY - GOD'S BEING IS IN BECOMING, trans. Horton Harris (Edinburgh and London: Scottish Academic Press, 1976).

798 Barth, CD I/1, p.299.

799 Ibid.

800 Jüngel, THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY, p.16.



God's being is identical to his revelation. His revelation manifests a threefold mode of being. Therefore, God's being may not be thought of as something abstract.<sup>801</sup> God's being is self-related being, structured according to the living dynamic of the relationship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is, therefore, already in his eternal being no other than he who he is in his revelation. 'He is thus in his being already ours in advance.'<sup>802</sup> In that he has revealed himself in Jesus Christ as he is, we must therefore confess that his being is a being-for-us, his being is grace.

Again, Barth has maintained the biblical dialectic of the Holy. The uniqueness of God's being, grounded as it is in the revelation of Christ, is his gracious decision on behalf of us, his love. Moreover, now we have added to the discussion the dimension of revelation. The event of revelation is not something other than God himself; it is the living being of God. This means that if the 'otherness' of God is exactly the 'otherness' of his grace, then this 'otherness' is also the event of revelation. The holiness of God means, therefore, that God is ontologically separate because of his gracious self-impartation which is his revelation. Thus the knowledge of the Holy can only be received by us; for the Holy is the event of gracious revelation.

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801 Ibid., p.29.

802 Ibid., p.64.

This, of course, bears direct relevance to Tillich's theology. By abstractly conceptualizing transcendence, Tillich cut himself off from the truly transcendent, for the 'otherness' of God is that which is given in Christ. The dialectic of the Holy forbids any side-glances around Jesus Christ which aim to find the 'God of the heavens' in abstract purity. The Holy God is one with his revelation in Jesus Christ. There is no other God behind Christ, or outside Christ; only God in Christ. The being of God is 'wholly other' and therefore the knowledge of him is given; and since the 'wholly other' is 'wholly for' us, the knowledge of him is given. To know Jesus Christ is to know God in the transcendent 'otherness' of his being.

So this, then, is the Holy: God in Jesus Christ. 'Let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.'<sup>803</sup>

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803 Hebrews 12:28(b)-29.

## CHAPTER VI

## THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE HOLY

'This is the place of my song-dream, the place the music played to me,' whispered the Rat, as if in a trance. 'Here, in this holy place, here if anywhere, surely we shall find Him!'

Then suddenly the Mole felt a great Awe fall upon him, an awe that turned his muscles to water, bowed his head, and rooted his feet to the ground. It was no panic terror - indeed he felt wonderfully at peace and happy - but it was an awe that smote and held him and, without seeing, he knew it could only mean that some august Presence was very, very near . . . .

Perhaps he would never have dared to raise his eyes, but that . . . the call and the summons seemed still dominant and imperious. He might not refuse, were Death himself waiting to strike him instantly, once he had looked with mortal eye on things rightly kept hidden. Trembling he obeyed, and raised his humble head; and then . . . he looked in the very eyes of the Friend and Helper . . . .

'Rat!' he found breath to whisper, shaking. 'Are you afraid?'

'Afraid?' murmured the Rat, his eyes shining with unutterable love. 'Afraid! Of Him? O, never, never! And yet - and yet - O, Mole, I am afraid!'

Then the two animals, crouching to the earth bowed their heads and did worship. 804

Rat and Mole - a fellowship of the Holy. Huddled close together in the posture of worship, the animals had looked upon the face of the Wholly Other and seen the eyes of a Friend and Helper.

And is this not the experience of the Church? Overpowered by the august Presence who has come very, very near, the Church has beheld the countenance of its Friend and Helper, Jesus Christ. As such, it is the fellowship of the Holy.

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804 Kenneth Grahame, THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS (London: Methuen Children's Books Ltd., Magnet reprint edition, 1978), pp.134-36.

### A. Call For The Password

In its creeds, the Church confesses its own holiness (credo sanctam ecclesiam).<sup>805</sup> Is this an honest assessment of the nature of its being? Or is it an arrogant assumption of an alien attribute? How is it possible for the Church - an institution often so painfully this-worldly in the worst sense of the term - to believe in its own holiness? Is not the Holy, by definition, the 'wholly other,' the great stranger in the world? In this final chapter, I shall argue that the adjective 'holy' is justifiably applied to the Church, and draw out the implications of this for our understanding of the relationship between the Church and the world.

(1) What is the biblical evidence to support the notion of a holy Church? First, it must be admitted that nowhere does the New Testament refer to a 'holy Church.' Hans Küng, for this reason, has emphasized that the idea of a holy institution is completely foreign to biblical thought: 'the New Testament knows nothing of institutional sanctity, of a sacred "it."' <sup>806</sup> He points out that what is at issue in the holiness of the Church is a completely personal sanctity.

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805 See, e.g., the Nicene Creed ('one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church'), and the Apostles' Creed ('one holy catholic Church').

806 Hans Küng, THE CHURCH, trans. Ray and Rosaleen Ockenden (London: Burns and Oates, 1967), p.325. See also Emil Brunner, THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH, FAITH, AND THE CONSUMMATION - DOGMATICS: Vol.III, trans. David Cairns and T. H. L. Parker (London: Lutterworth Press, 1962), p.125.

It is believers who have been set apart from the sinful world by God's saving act in Christ and have entered a new Christian existence who make up the original 'communio sanctorum'; they constitute the Church of the saints and hence the holy Church. 807

Küng has correctly recognized that the materialization of the Holy, as occasionally present in the Old Testament, is no longer present in the New Testament. Sanctity is personal; that is to say, it has to do with persons in their relationship with God and each other.

Nevertheless, it would not be correct to understand 'personal' in the sense of 'individualistic.'<sup>808</sup> The Church is more than an aggregate of individuals who profess faith in Jesus Christ. The ἐκκλησία is the community of persons called out of the world by the Word of God in Jesus Christ.<sup>809</sup> In him, a new people of God has been constituted within the old. With reference to Exodus 19:5-6,<sup>810</sup>

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807 Küng, THE CHURCH, p.325.

808 Brunner seems to imply this when he writes: 'The Church as a sancta ecclesia is known by nothing else than this, that here men are present who allow this incredible Word of God's love in Christ to be said to them, believe it, and obey it . . . .' (Brunner, THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH, FAITH, AND THE CONSUMMATION, p.126).

809 ekklesia, derived via ek-kaleo, which was used for the summons to the army to assembly, from kaleō, to call . . . . denotes in the usage of antiquity the popular assembly of the competent full citizens of the polis, city' (L. Coenen, 'The Church,' THE NEW INTERNATIONAL DICTIONARY OF NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY - Vol.I, ed. Colin Brown (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1975), p.291). See also K. L. Schmidt, ἐκκλησία, THEOLOGICAL DICTIONARY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT - Vol.III, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1965), pp.501-36.

810 ' . . . you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'

the Church is addressed in I Peter as 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people' (2:9). Even as the miracle of divine deliverance from Egypt meant that Israel was to 'be holy,'<sup>811</sup> so also the community of Christ is admonished to 'be holy yourselves in all your conduct' (I Pet. 1:15); that is, the Church, as the New Israel, is called to live according to the nature of its new being as God's chosen people.

With the powerful historical sweep of Pauline theology this idea of the Church as the new people of God reaches its clearest conceptualization. 'On the holy stump of the OT people of God the new branches from the Gentile world have been engrafted (Rom. 11:17), and they are sanctified by the stump.'<sup>812</sup> This stump is obviously Christ, 'the root of Jesse' ordained to rule the Gentiles (Rom. 15:12). And according to Ephesians, Christ has 'broken down the dividing wall of hostility,' and out of two groups - Gentiles and Israelites - has created 'one new man' (Eph. 2:14-15). There is now one household of God, 'built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord' (Eph. 2:20-21).

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811 'For I am the Lord who brought you up out of the Land of Egypt, to be your God; you shall therefore be holy, for I am holy' (Lev. 11:45).

812 Procksch, 'ἅγιος', p.106.

Notice: 'holy temple.' The imagery is cultic. This, of course, is not at all surprising, for as we saw in the last chapter, there are two biblical strands of tradition regarding holiness: the cultic-religious and the prophetic-ethical. In Christ, these have merged; but for his community both retain significance as together they illuminate what it means to be the holy people of God.

a. The language of the cult provides much of the imagery used in the New Testament to describe the character of the Church. It is the *ναὸς ἅγιος* (I Cor. 3:17; Eph. 2:21) - the holy temple. Accordingly, 'to all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints' ( *ἁγίοις* ), Paul urges that they present their 'bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God' (Rom. 1:7; 12:1). The Apostle describes his own life as a 'libation upon the sacrificial offering' of the faith of the Philippian saints (Phil. 2:17).

Cultic terminology is employed more vigorously in the Letter to The Hebrews than anywhere else in the New Testament. Here Christ is presented as the great high priest 'after the order of Melchizedek' (5:6; 17:17), that mysterious figure who, even in the Old Testament, seemed to transcend the Aaronic priesthood. As the high priest who brought to perfection the new covenant, of which the old was but an imperfect shadow (ch.8), Christ 'entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption' (9:12) - a redemption, moreover, that is complete, having been efficaciously established 'once for all

at the end of the age' (9:26). Thus Procksch describes the *ἅγιοι* as 'members of a cultic circle grounded in the sacrifice of Christ.'<sup>813</sup>

b. Similarly, the prophetic-ethical conception of the Holy also emerges in the New Testament description of the Church. This stream of tradition emphasizes the moral distinctiveness of holiness, and so the Church is described in ways which stress its cleanness.

Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:25-27).

Here *ἁγία* is linked with *ἁμωμος* ; the final purpose of Christ's self-giving on behalf of the Church is that it may have a holy purity.

As the prophetic-ethical description of the Holy finds its clearest manifestation in the coupling of love and holiness (e.g., Hosea), so also Paul carries this linkage into the age of the Church. In his benediction at the end of the third chapter in I Thessalonians, he writes:

may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all men, as we do to you, so that he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord with all his saints. 814

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813 Ibid., p.107.

814 I Thess. 3:12-13 (italics mine).



And Paul makes a personal boast that by the grace of God he has 'behaved in the world . . . with holiness . . .',<sup>815</sup> Clearly, Paul discerns a connection between holiness and the Christian walk.

So also does the author of I Peter, who called the Christians to 'be holy yourselves in all your conduct' (1:15). In what does this 'conduct' consist? The believers are 'purified' in order 'to love one another earnestly from the heart' (1:22).

Furthermore, even when the New Testament terminology is largely cultic, the thought is never far from the ethical. 'Present your bodies as living sacrifices, holy . . . to God' (Rom. 12:1).

In Christianity the material offering, distinct from the giver, is replaced by the personal offering of the body, of the earthly life, inseparable from the existence of the one who offers. It is at this point that the holy impinges on the ethical, with which it may so easily be equated. 816

c. My concern, to this point, has not been to develop a complete biblical theology of the holiness of the Church. Rather, I have hoped simply to show, first, that it is biblically justifiable to speak of the 'holy Church,' for holiness is a quality attributed by the New Testament writers not only to individuals, but also to the community as a whole. Secondly, I have tried to demonstrate that both the cultic-religious and prophetic-ethical conceptions of the Holy, which are clearly present in the Old Testament, re-emerge in the descriptive language of the New Testament concerning the Church.

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815 I Cor. 1:12 (italics mine).

816 Procksch, 'ἀγιος', p.108.

The examples cited are certainly not exhaustive, but may, I hope, be adequate to make the point.

Therefore, if we have been on the right track - one that has at times had to wind tortuously through the biblical material - then we should expect the final word about the Church's holiness to be an affirmation of its holiness in Christ. As demonstrated in the last chapter, it is in him that both the cultic and prophetic approaches to the Holy find their ultimate unity. If there are such things as 'saints' in this world, it is only because they are 'saints in Christ Jesus.'<sup>817</sup> Though perhaps guilty of over-simplification, Schmidt is nevertheless not far from the mark when he writes:

In face of all sociological attempts to understand the question of the Church, it must be considered that in Paul, in his disciples and then in the Fourth Evangelist ecclesiology is simply Christology and vice versa.<sup>818</sup>

The reason for this is the fact that the Church is the fellowship of those who have been 'blessed . . . in Christ with every spiritual blessing,' not the least of which is that they have been chosen 'in him before the foundation of the world' to the end that they may 'be holy and blameless before him.'<sup>819</sup> If the Church is able to be the bride of Christ, it is only because the Groom himself has sanctified her and made her worthy.<sup>820</sup> Thus the holiness

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817 Phil. 1:1 (italics mine).

818 Schmidt, 'ἐκκλησία', p.512.

819 Eph. 1:3-4.

820 Eph. 5:25-27.

of the Church is but the consequence of the fact that in Christ God has reconciled it to himself, and, being grounded and rooted in him, it is now qualified 'to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.'

He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. 821

Nowhere is the Church's being more clearly underscored as a being-in-Christ than in the *σῶμα χριστοῦ* imagery of the New Testament.<sup>822</sup> To the Corinthians Paul says simply, 'now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it' (I Cor. 12:27). They do not have to become the body of Christ; they are the body of Christ by virtue of their standing in him who is its head (Eph. 4:15). This means that, as the ruling 'head' of the Church, Christ is the source of the Church's being. The Church is holy, not because of its own intrinsic nature, but because it participates in his holiness.

(2) How has systematic theology accounted for this biblical material? Just as with the holiness of God, theologians have tended to follow out one of the strands of tradition regarding the Holy; that is, the holiness of the Church has been described in either

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821 Col. 1:12-14.

822 See Rom. 12:3-8; I Cor. 12; Eph. 4:1-16. See Ernest Best, ONE BODY IN CHRIST - A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE CHURCH TO CHRIST IN THE EPISTLES OF THE APOSTLE PAUL (London: SPCK, 1955); Paul S. Minear, IMAGES OF THE CHURCH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT (London: Lutterworth Press, 1960), pp.173-220; John A. T. Robinson, THE BODY - A STUDY IN PAULINE THEOLOGY (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1952); Eduard Schweizer, 'σῶμα', THEOLOGICAL DICTIONARY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT - Vol.VII, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1971), pp.1068-74.

a cultic-religious, prophetic-ethical, or Christocentric way.<sup>823</sup>

a. In his book THE CHURCH, G. C. Berkouwer attempts to understand the holiness of the Church in light of Rudolf Otto's THE IDEA OF THE HOLY.<sup>824</sup> In so doing, he clearly places himself in the train of those who have understood the Holy in the cultic-religious categories. It is characteristic of this approach that the moral and ethical connotations of holiness are consciously set aside in favour of a religious emphasis on its 'wholly other' aspect. Thus Berkouwer refers to Otto's description of the Holy as tremendum and fascinans, and asks whether it would not be helpful 'to bring the holiness of the Church into connection with the fascinans.'<sup>825</sup> While recognizing the empirical difficulty of considering the historical Church in terms of the 'fascinating,' Berkouwer nevertheless wants to uncover the genuine fascinans 'which rests in the acceptance of the gift, the nearness of the Lord in humility, in nostalgia, and striving for the sanctification that is seen and experienced by others.'<sup>826</sup>

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823 The following brief survey is in no way meant to be an exhaustive historical analysis on the different theological formulations of the holiness of the Church. Rather, it aims simply to demonstrate that these three strands of tradition regarding the Holy have indeed surfaced in various ways as the Church has sought to describe the nature of its own holiness.

824 G. C. Berkouwer, THE CHURCH, trans. James E. Davison (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1976), pp.325-33. For a discussion of Rudolf Otto's THE IDEA OF THE HOLY, see Chapter V of the present thesis.

825 Berkouwer, THE CHURCH, pp.325-26.

826 Ibid., p.328.

What, exactly, is the fascinans?

In analyzing what is actually fascinating, one has pointed out that the fascinans has usually been connected to what is new, to something surprising that was outside our horizon of expectation, and, especially, to 'what had never been before.' 827

Berkouwer acknowledges that the Church has all too often not been associated with newness, but rather its opposite, as the guardian of tradition. But the Church cannot be related exclusively to the past for the simple reason that 'in the New Testament, salvation is connected with unmistakable clarity to radical newness.'<sup>828</sup> This newness is both an eschatological hope and a present reality for the Church. 'The old has passed away, behold, the new has come,'<sup>829</sup> as Paul expressed it.

In the light of this Pauline 'lyric' about the new life (Eph.4:24), the new creation (II Cor.5:17; Gal.6:15), and the new man (Col. 3:10; Eph.2:15), one can say that, although 'the past' and 'tradition' are not lost in oblivion for Paul, whatever is 'venerable' still has to legitimize itself for this new time. Only so can it be incorporated in the continuity of life in Christ on the way to the future. For this life is no longer characterized by what is 'old' and 'antiquated,' but by a radical newness. 830

Holiness, then, for Berkouwer, is 'the setting apart of the Church in Christ and for newness of life.'<sup>831</sup>

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827 Ibid.

828 Ibid., p.330.

829 II Cor. 5:17;

830 Berkouwer, THE CHURCH, p.330.

831 Ibid., p.331.

Berkouwer is certainly on solid ground when he attempts to demonstrate the element of newness in the Gospel. In Christ, the new has come. But it is not clear why Berkouwer has understood holiness so completely in the light of this. The only apparent reason is his unquestioned acceptance of Otto's definition of the Holy. The difficulty with this, as shown in the last chapter, is that such a position allows 'holiness' to be defined by an external, perhaps empirically observable, concept. Ironically, this 'idea of the Holy,' which above all aims to make clear its 'wholly other' aspect, allows the Holy itself to be taken bondage by an alien concept - a concept, moreover, discovered and formulated in the world over against which the Holy is supposed to be 'wholly other.' If the Holy is distinct from the world and its rationality (empirical or otherwise) then it must define itself in its own terms. That the Holy has revealed itself in the Word of God, we have already shown. And what this Word has revealed in Christ is a holiness marked by a distinctive otherness which is the alien otherness of God's redemptive love. Certainly this love in Christ is new, and its Gospel has much newness about it, but Berkouwer, by limiting his understanding of holiness to this, has run the risk of evacuating holiness of its content. God's 'newness' in Christ is something specific in content; so also is the 'newness' of the Church.

b. With more frequency than the cultic-religious, the prophetic-ethical approach to holiness has also been used with regard to the Church. Here the Church's holiness is conceived of as moral or ethical purity, as freedom from the stain of sin.

Now of course the immediate problem one is faced with when this approach is adopted is the empirical fact that the Church is all too obviously not free from sin. Though by faith one may believe it has been clothed in the righteousness of Christ, by sight one clearly sees the bride of Christ still dressed in the soiled garments of unrighteousness. Thus holiness must be seen to be a matter of 'more or less' - a quantity possessed in certain degrees.

Calvin, for example, believes the Church is holy in the sense that it is daily advancing: 'it makes progress from day to day but has not yet reached its goal of holiness.'<sup>832</sup> Because Christians 'zealously aspire to holiness and perfect purity, the cleanness that they have not yet fully attained is granted them by God's kindness.'<sup>833</sup> In Calvin's view, holiness is granted to the Church by God's grace in Christ in an objective, eschatological sense, but is only a present reality in part. 'It is . . . true that the church's spots and wrinkles have been wiped away, but this is a daily process until Christ by his coming completely removes whatever remains.'<sup>834</sup> In its concrete actuality, then, the Church is less holy than it will one day be, and in the future will be more holy than it is today. That it is daily advancing means that something is being added to it, rather like a liquid being poured into a cup. It is being filled with stainless purity.

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832 John Calvin, INSTITUTES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION - Vol.II, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), p.1031.

833 Ibid., p.1032.

834 Ibid., p.1161.

Though in a vastly different theological framework, E. H. Askwith takes a similar approach in his dealing with holiness. When it comes to the holiness of the Church, he contends, we must not seek to understand it according to the meaning of *УТР*

and say that the 'holiness' of the church connotes its separateness from the world, however true such an idea might be. The Church is holy because it partakes of the divine character, or because such is its ideal. 835

Holiness thus has to do with participation in the 'divine character,' if not in fact, at least in ideal. The Church is sanctified by its aspirations, as it were, which will be progressively realized in the present. This theology, cast in the liberal optimism of the nineteenth century, is cut from a very different cloth than Calvin's; but both have an eschatological emphasis that views the Church as advancing into greater and greater holiness.

Heinrich Heppe does not stress the progressive addition of holiness as much, but he also seems to come at the problem quantitatively. Faced with the belief that holiness is a moral, ethical quality, on the one hand, and the actuality of the Church's sinfulness on the other, Heppe puts both in the scales and declares that the holiness side is the heavier.

The Church is holy and infallible, i.e., she is established in the life and knowledge of faith, in the same way as her members, the elect and called believers, who cannot fall into deadly sins or deviate from the sanctifying basis of truth. Consequently, while the Church is indeed not without lack of knowledge and of life, still, preserved by grace she cannot completely lose

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835 E. H. Askwith, THE CHRISTIAN CONCEPTION OF HOLINESS (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1900), pp.239-40 (italics mine).



the righteousness of Christ bestowed on her, deny the basic doctrines of the Gospel and sin against God with really deliberate disobedience and persistently; so that at any time she therefore remains in essential possession of grace and of sanctifying knowledge. 836

And finally, John Macquarrie gives a more contemporary expression of this approach. Holiness, he tells us, 'is very much a case of "more or less," and to many it will seem that the Church has often been less rather than more holy.'<sup>837</sup> What does 'holiness' mean? It means 'being an agent of the incarnation, letting Christ be formed in the Church and in the world.'<sup>838</sup> The results will be ethical in nature. Unfortunately, the Church will not always live according to its proper moral standards, but in the end one can hope that the specific failures will be over-balanced by the life of the Church as a whole. He writes:

in many particular instances, the Church utterly falls short of holiness, and may even, through its support of wrong causes or a reactionary politico-social status quo, or sometimes through the idolization of its own structure, work against sanctification. Yet one would hope - and legitimately, since this is simply part of the eschatological hope - that these lapses would be episodes which would be eventually overcome in the total life of the Church. 839

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836 Heppe, REFORMED DOGMATICS, pp.662-63.

837 John Macquarrie, PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1966), p.363.

838 Ibid.

839 Ibid., p.364.

Calvin, Askwith, Heppe, Macquarrie - theologians with systems that vary considerably; however, they have in common the fact that all believe holiness to have to do with the ethical life of the Church. Since conduct clearly is not always free from sin, they attempt to solve the problem quantitatively, that is, by measuring holiness against unholiness, and pronouncing the former to be (at least eschatologically) the dominant characteristic of the Church.

As we saw in the last chapter, when holiness is defined ethically, to the exclusion of the religious 'otherness' which is also a part of the biblical notion of the Holy, it risks trivialization into a this-worldly legalism where the freely transcendent is bound by the chains of moralism. Consequently, the religious dynamic is lost as the vertical of the 'wholly other' is flattened out into the horizontal of a proper code of well-regulated behaviour. Not only does this ignore a considerable body of biblical material regarding holiness, but it sets the FIRE under a bushel; it de-claws the Lion of Judah into a tame, domesticated pet as comfortable and familiar as old slippers. Commandments, principles, ideals: these may all remain, but they are de-fused, safe, non-threatening, as long as the lightning shock of the Holy has been deflected by the rod of moralism.

When holiness is quantitatively measured against unholiness, we must ask: With what sort of scales is the judgment made? Who has supplied the measuring device? In the furnace of which - and whose - values has the weighbeam been cast? How many ethical deeds are needed to cancel out an unholy deed? Certainly the sort of

legalism implied in these questions is far from the minds of the theologians just examined, and, in most instances, rendered powerless by the rest of their theological thought; but the questions serve to point out the slippery slope one ventures upon when holiness is defined in primarily ethical terms. When it is a question of 'more or less' holiness, something independent of holiness itself - a value, an ideal, a principle? - will be required to judge human conduct and pronounce verdict upon it. Consequently, the Holy is stripped of its regal robes of transcendence, and forcibly wrapped in the beggarly rags of human wisdom and morality. When this happens holiness is lost, for whatever else one may have in hand, the Holy remains ungraspable in the radical freedom of its 'wholly otherness.'

c. In what does the holiness of the Church consist? To this point, I have shown what it cannot mean. Holiness may neither be reduced to a bare religious notion, indicating a formal separation void of specific content, nor to a purely ethical concept where it acts as merely a cipher for a moralism judged and directed by human reason. Biblically, 'the Holy' is both a religious and ethical term: in Jesus Christ both the cultic and prophetic approaches to holiness find their fulfilment and final unity; in him, the two have become one. As the Holy One of God, Jesus Christ is the 'wholly other,' absolutely free and distinct from this world, the personal embodiment of transcendent grace. And yet, inasmuch as the 'wholly other' is revealed in grace, he is shown to be 'wholly for'; what sets the Holy One off from the world is precisely his being for the world.

Thus the unity of the religious and ethical sides of holiness is this: the utter separation of the divine from the human is shown precisely in the divine love for the human. The FIRE of the Holy is the consuming fire of love.<sup>840</sup>

Two important implications follow from this for the Church. First, because 'holiness' is, in its original sense, the act of God's grace in Christ, it can never be abstracted from the event of grace. That is to say, the holiness of the Church is always God's gift to the Church. And second, inasmuch as the holiness of the Church is participation in God's gift of holiness, the distinctiveness of its being is revealed as the very distinctiveness of God himself.

1. The Church is holy because God is holy. If it is true that God's holiness is the event of his grace in Jesus Christ, in which the 'wholly other' is revealed as the 'wholly for,' then this means that the Church's holiness is grounded in the holiness of God. What sets God off in ontological distinction from the rest of creation is his transcendent 'otherness' - an 'otherness' which is, in fact, his love for the world. He is separate because he does not will to remain separated; he is ontologically distinct because he wills to share his distinctive being with others, to enter into fellowship with them. His gracious love is the true antithesis between the divine and the human. Therefore, the holiness of God is the guarantee of his grace. The Church exists, not in spite of his holy 'otherness,' but because of it. His holiness is

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840 For a fuller discussion of this idea, see Chapter V.

the uniqueness of his grace by which he has constituted for himself a people for fellowship. That there is a koinonia of persons who are chosen by the Father, reconciled in Jesus Christ, and empowered for praise and service in the Holy Spirit, is because God is holy, and remaining true to the distinctiveness of his being as love, he has established a sanctuary of grateful human response in the midst of the world.

The Church is holy, then, not of its own accord, but because God is holy. And in the active working out of that holiness, the Church has been granted a share in his holiness. Thus the Ephesian letter, in its opening paean to the God of grace, states:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. 841

The purpose of our election in Christ: that we should be holy before him. In other words, God has established, in the act of holiness, the reality of holiness in the midst of his creation. The holy Word has created a holy echo. The Church is this holy response. It is the fellowship of the Holy.

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841 Eph. 1:3-4. See also Col. 1:21-22: 'And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him . . . .' (italics mine).

The Church is holy because God made it holy. Even as Israel was called out of the nations to be the holy people of God,<sup>842</sup> so also the Church, the New Israel, has been called out of the world to be God's people in Jesus Christ. 'It is God who distinguishes the Church, sets it apart, marks it out for his own and makes it holy.'<sup>843</sup> The holiness of the Church is the word of God amongst humanity; it is a result of his election in Christ and the impartation of his Holy Spirit. It

is not accessible to us or controllable by us; it is not something seen, but something that is revealed to those who in faith open their hearts to the sanctifying Spirit of God. To the believers alone is revealed the fact that this people which looks so familiar to other peoples and communities in the world, and yet is fundamentally so dissimilar, is illumined by the holiness of God . . . . God sets the community apart as something holy by awakening faith in the individual, by justifying him. 844

We must stress the divine initiative in the establishment of holiness, because of the nature of holiness itself. Since the 'wholly other' is nothing else than the 'wholly for,' grace issues from holiness. There is no holiness without grace, for the

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842 'When Israel is called to be the people of God and spoken of as the holy people, the underlying idea is that of separation. Israel is the people which is set apart from all others, not for its own merits but because the Lord has been pleased to choose it, to separate it and to consecrate it as holy' (Stephen Neill, CHRISTIAN HOLINESS (London: Lutterworth Press, 1960), p.13).

843 Küng, THE CHURCH, p.325.

844 Ibid., p.326.

divine 'otherness' to which the word 'holiness' points is the 'otherness' of redeeming love. Grace is the distinguishing aspect of the being of God. 'God is love.' Therefore, because 'holiness' at once denotes what is God's distinctive being (as opposed to all other beings) and reveals that distinction to be his loving grace, we must affirm that only God can grant holiness to others and that he does grant it. Since grace is the mark of the divine, only God may give it; because this mark is grace, it is given. Thus the Church is holy because God is holy.

Now it is for this reason that all attempts to define the Church's holiness in terms of certain ethical qualities which it possesses in a 'more or less' way must be rejected. Where holiness is established, the reign of grace effectively draws all into its domain. If the Church is holy, it is by God's grace extra nos; its holiness is granted in an objective way, outside of itself. And because holiness and grace can never be sundered, the Church may never point to one part of its life and witness and say, 'This is holy and righteous' (as if it needed no grace), and to another part, 'This is sinfully unholy' (and thus in need of grace). For if the Church is holy, then it is so only in grace, and grace is the overcoming of sin by divine love. There cannot be parts of the Church that are holy and thus freed from the structure of grace, and other parts that are still sinful and dependent on grace. For - and this is the critical link in the argument - the Church has its being in Jesus Christ, it is his body even as he is its head. There is no part of the Church isolated from him; anything separated from his being is not the Church. Therefore, because

Jesus Christ is the name and personal embodiment of God's loving grace, it follows that the whole Church is established in grace. Being the body of Christ, it exists totally in grace, and thus totally in the sphere of God's holiness.

Furthermore, because grace is what constitutes the Church, the Church is in itself the opposite of holy love; it is sinful. Grace is the overcoming of sin by God's redeeming love in Christ. Where grace is total, sin is total. Without the barrier there would be no need for the overcoming. If the whole Church is constituted in Christ, if the whole Church is thus established in the sphere of grace, then the whole Church is also guilty of sin. Such are the implications of confessing the sancta ecclesia. The whole Church is holy, and the whole Church is sinful: 'simul justa et peccatrix.'

There are not two Churches, one holy when seen from above and one sinful when seen from below. There is only one Church, holy and sinful at the same time, casta meretrix, as it has often been called since patristic times, echoing the Old Testament imagery. 845

This does not mean, though, that holiness and sinfulness are simply two co-equal sides of the Church. 'The holiness of the Church is light, revealing its nature, the sinfulness of the Church is shadow, darkening its true nature.'<sup>846</sup> The true being of the Church is its holy life in Christ; with him it exists in a

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845 Ibid., p.328. So also Hall: the Church's membership 'consists of those who have been separated by election of grace, rather than of those who have become perfect' (Hall, THEOLOGICAL OUTLINES, p.227).

846 Ibid.



relationship structured by grace, and thus always as a fellowship of sinners grateful for the love and mercy of God. But because the holy love of God is the eternal and victorious side of this structure of grace, the sin of the Church is its passing shadow. As the Church, a pilgrim people, journeys on through its historical existence, its constant movement is away from the sin of its past and toward the eternally victorious love of God.

2. The Church is holy as God is holy. As we have just seen, the Church is holy because God is holy; that is, as a consequence of his holiness, which is also grace, he overcomes the barriers erected by the sin of humanity. He establishes holiness in the midst of his creation; he shares the uniqueness of his being with a fellowship of persons united together by his act of holiness in Christ Jesus. Now because it is God's holiness which is granted, it must then be acknowledged that the Church is holy as God is holy. The exact nature of its holiness is not known and measured by some sort of external ethical standard; rather, holiness is defined by God alone. The shape and content of the Church's holiness is seen only in the light of God's holiness. Thus to comprehend its own true nature, it must look to the event of divine holiness, to Jesus Christ, in whom it shares in the being of God. In him it participates in the holiness embodied in his person.

At this juncture, we should recall the definition of holiness arrived at in the last chapter. The Holy is revealed in the Holy One, Jesus Christ. In him is the uniting of the religious and ethical conceptions of holiness woven throughout the biblical account.

The resulting description of holiness: what sets God apart as 'wholly other,' in ontological distinction from humanity, is the fact that he is 'wholly for' humanity. The true, distinctive nature of God's being was revealed in Christ, and thus showed itself to be gracious love. So we were led to assert the strange fact that the antithesis is the overcoming of the antithesis; the genuine, eternal distinction between the divine and the human, the holy and the profane, is the love which overturns and defeats the false and passing division between God and his human partner.

The implications of this for the holiness of the Church are far-reaching. It is the end of all attempts to understand the holiness of the Church in purely religious ways. The Church's separateness is not merely a formal abstraction; it has a specific content. If God's holiness is revealed in his self-giving love for the world, and if it is this which distinguishes his being from all others, then does it not follow that the Church, as holy, is also ontologically distinct from the world precisely in its self-giving for the world? As already shown, the Church is holy to the extent that it is in Christ and therefore shares his being. His being is the being of love, the active event of God's self-sacrifice for the sake of sinful humanity. As 'saints in Christ Jesus,'<sup>847</sup> therefore, the Church participates in the being of him

who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

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847 Phil. 1:1.

And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. 848

The holiness of the Church, as concrete fellowship in the holiness of God, means that the Church is ontologically distinct from the world and that its distinction is its embodiment of the self-giving love of Christ for the world.

As it lives by faith in Jesus Christ, and in the power of his Holy Spirit, it is holy. This means, first of all, that it really is set apart from the world. To deny this is to deny the basic root meaning of holiness. The Holy is the great stranger in this world, utterly distinct, separate. As the Church is granted a share in this holiness, it cannot fail to become different - perhaps not always visibly, but different in essence, ontologically, because it has a new being in Christ. Therefore, its true nature, whether immediately evident or not, is an alien characteristic which does not grow out of the inherent goodness of its members but is given to it. We could say, then, that the Church is, ontologically, as ecstatic community of the Holy. Its essential being is outside of itself in Christ; its 'life is hid with Christ in God.'<sup>849</sup>

The Church has already been set apart from the world by God as something holy; this is an effect of his grace. It must remain set apart; this is his call to metanoia and renewal. It will remain set apart; this is his thankful promise.

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848 Phil. 2:6-8.

849 Col. 3:3.

The Church cannot maintain its course of itself; like Israel, it is supported by God's mercy and faithfulness. Its being set apart cannot be revoked; the whole New Testament message depends on this belief. 850

Yet this separateness cannot mean the Church is set apart in aloofness; its separation is not the neutral self-saving distance created by a Pilate who washes his hands of the godforsaken agony of the world's black Friday. Its separateness is the distinction of being found in the Holy One who did not wash his own hands but washed the sin-stained world with the blood of his broken body, the One for whom it was not too mean a thing even to wash away the dust and sweat of his disciples' feet on the eve of his death. If the Church is 'wholly other,' it is so as its Lord, as it is 'wholly for.' The Church is not the world; to the extent that it is 'wholly for' it is 'wholly other.' Its being is not that of the world but that of the One who stands over against the world in the judgment of his grace: separate in love for the world; distinguished by self-giving in a world whose engines are fuelled with the crude oil of self-love; different in new life from the aged and broken-down world encompassed by death; set off by servitude in a world drowning in the quicksands of its own self-exaltation; filled with the refreshing wind of the indwelling Spirit of the Holy in a world choking in the blinding smog of its materialism. The Church is different, ontologically distinct.

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850 Küng, THE CHURCH, pp.341-42.

But the church is most surely preserved from becoming the world when she embodies the servant-form of the incarnate Lord, as she becomes the suffering servant and bears in her body the dying of Christ for men, as she is willing to make the world's suffering her own. And the church most surely becomes the sinful world when she is afraid to spend her life and seeks to save it, becomes self-defensive and trusts only to her own strength, falls into spiritual pride and holds aloof from the world . . . 851

Even as the being of Christ stands over against the world (separate) in the gracious judgment of his self-emptying love, so the Church, as it 'lives and moves and has its being in him,' is separate - separate in the concrete love it lives out on behalf of the world.

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851 Claude Welch, THE REALITY OF THE CHURCH (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p.207.

## B. The Advance In Force

(1) In the last chapter it was shown that the loss of ontological distinction between the Church and the world, as exemplified by the theologies of Bonhoeffer, Tillich, Pannenberg, and Moltmann, was the result of either an immanentism or a universalism. The former eventuated from Bonhoeffer's incarnationism and Tillich's transcendentalism; the latter was a consequence of Pannenberg's and Moltmann's eschatology. In seeking first to understand the holiness of God, we found in 'the idea of the Holy' helpful guidance for defining the proper relationship between God and the world. Following this lead, the inadmissibility of any sort of immanentism which undermines the ontological distinction between God and the world became evident. Now, in discussing the holiness of the Church, we raise the question about God-in-relationship-to-the-world-in-sin. What does the Church's holiness mean for the thought of Pannenberg and Moltmann, especially their universalism which tends to undercut the ontological distinction between the Church and the world? With regard to Pannenberg, we must re-assert that the Church's holiness is established in the grace of God in Christ Jesus; and against the background of Moltmann's thought, we must re-emphasize that the Church's holiness is established in the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

a. With the torchlight of the doctrine of holiness cast upon it, the theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg is vulnerable to criticism because of its emphasis on ontological wholeness. As noted earlier,<sup>852</sup> Pannenberg's system emerges out of a passion for

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852 See Chapter III.

wholeness. It is his concern to grasp the truth in its entirety and sweeping universality. Individual events are meaningful, he contends, only within their contexts; each context requires a greater context, until the final meaning of all reality is revealed at the end of history. As the determining power and unity of all things, God himself is the universal truth which will be revealed at the end. He has, however, proleptically manifested himself in the eschatological event of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

According to Pannenberg, this means that since the end has in fact broken into the midst of history, we are now able to grasp, though of course only partially, the meaning of universal history. Among other things, the resurrection also validates the teaching of Jesus regarding the future reign of God, and since the being of God is one with his reign, Pannenberg describes God as the 'power of the future.' Because God is the creative source of all historical events, all things must necessarily flow out of the future; the end, therefore, is really the beginning. Thus Pannenberg's system creates for the mind's eye a circle of wholeness: God, the unity and power of all things, is future, and all historical reality both flows from him and toward him.

This totalitarianism of the future caused us to ask about the place of evil and brokenness in Pannenberg's holistic view of reality. If all things evolve out of a future of absolute good, then is evil simply a temporary illusion which will be cleared up at the end of time when the universal truth is finally revealed in its fulness? And if so, what then of the joint testimony of Scripture and human experience to the very real presence of evil in this world?

And what of the brokenness of Jesus himself - where does the cross of the Crucified One fit into this system of symmetrical wholeness?

These questions invite a comparison between Pannenberg's theology and the doctrine of holiness. Holiness, it has been maintained, is the absolute otherness of God's grace. Now inasmuch as we must speak of holiness in terms of grace, sin is presupposed. Until this point, sin has remained in the background: a silent presence in the discussion, asserting itself only indirectly. But now we must give more direct attention to this dark partner of holiness, this black shadow cast upon the wall of reality by the light of grace.

Holiness manifests not only God, but sin,<sup>853</sup> that is, in the event of God's holy act in Jesus Christ, whereby his ontological distinction from the world was shown to be his love for the world, we have given to us both the knowledge of the uniqueness of the being of God and therein the knowledge of the being of the world. If the event of grace reveals the distinctive nature of God to be love, then its opposite, sin, is also shown. With the shining of the light, the darkness is revealed as darkness. The Holy is 'wholly other,' not abstractly but concretely, in being 'wholly for.' Now we ask: 'Wholly other' than what? The answer: 'wholly other' than what is not 'wholly for'; and what is not 'wholly for' is the world in sin. Because the uniqueness of the being of God manifest in Christ is his self-giving love by which he

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853 So also P. T. Forsyth, THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS, p.24: 'To bring sin home, and grace home, then, the Holy must be brought home.'



overcomes the distance between himself and humanity, its opposite can be nothing other than the unloving creation of the distance in the first place. This the Scriptures term 'sin.' Sin is the negative to God's positive; the world's No against God's Yes. It is the long shadow touching the form of humanity as it stands in the light of God.

The holiness of God is his being pro nobis, the event of his grace in Jesus Christ. In him, he surrendered, 'emptied himself,' for the sake of the beloved. He took the form of a servant to minister to the broken wounds of humanity. By his own suffering and death he built a bridge across the great divide, opening a thoroughfare between the divine and the human. The holiness of God is grace: it is self-giving, other-oriented, aimed at fellowship. Now since it is this which separates God and humankind, then we must define sin as its opposite: self-absorption, ego-oriented, struggling for autonomy. If holiness is the glad acceptance of servitude, sin is the great quest for lordship. If holiness is the using of self for the sake of the other, sin is the using of the other for the sake of the self. If holiness is Life giving itself over to death to secure life for the other, sin is death struggling for life only to secure death. Thus Paul writes: 'For the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.'<sup>854</sup>

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854 Rom. 6:23.

Holiness, then, defines both the being of God (love) and the being of humanity (sin), and as this distinction in being has been established in the act of holiness, the event of God's judging grace in Jesus Christ, all monism must be ruled out. We cannot conceive of reality as one ontological whole. Though perhaps aesthetically satisfying in its geometrical completeness, such a system is clearly an unwelcome intruder in the house of theology. For as theology attempts to think out the faith of the Church from the event of God's grace in Christ, it comes face to face with an unavoidable dualism: on the one side, God and his loving grace, and on the other side, humanity with its loveless sin. To be sure, this dualism is not absolute, for it is finally overcome in the being of Christ himself; yet, because the being of Christ is the event of grace, a relational structure between the divine and human is eternally established. God is the gracious giver; humanity, the sinful recipient. Thus what we have is not the smooth evolution of reality out of a divine totalitarian power of the future, the unravelling of an unbroken ontological whole; rather, in Christ a permanent structure of grace has been ontologized, so that the picture of the whole includes not only the light but the dark. What we have in Christ is the gracious overcoming-of-a-conflict. Because this is in Christ, a unity is secured over an abstract dualism; but as this is grace, a proper dualism is maintained against a sweeping monism. In the unity of Christ we have, as it were, a wholeness which includes brokenness, grace which is also judgment. The unity of God's act of holiness in Christ is not a oneness,

but the complementary interplay of the dualism of divine love and human sin in conflict - the final result of which is not eternal discord but the harmony of the triumphant song of grace.

The difficulty with Pannenberg's universalism - indeed, all universalism - is that it turns the vital, moving, engaging relationship between God and humanity into something automatic and predictable. T. F. Torrance has identified the problem with universalism in this way:

Universalism is always and inevitably inconsistent for two reasons. (a) It commits the logical fallacy of transmitting movement into necessity. At the very best universalism could only be concerned with hope, with a possibility, and could only be expressed apocalyptically. But to turn it into a dogmatic statement, which is what the doctrine of universalism does, is to destroy the possibility in the necessity . . . .

(b) It commits the dogmatic fallacy of systematizing the illogical. Sin has a fundamentally surd-like character . . . . The Christian faith which has looked into the limitless depth of the Eli, Eli lama sabachthani, and considered the great weight of sin to discover that only by the act of God can man get across the gulf, will accept the way of humility where the cross makes foolish the wisdom of this world. It will learn the discipline of suspending judgment in order to avoid foisting a false and abortive unity or a closed system of thought upon the actual facts of existence . . . . Whether all men will as a matter of fact be saved or not, in the nature of the case, cannot be known. 855

Though Pannenberg does not argue directly for universalism, such a doctrine is called for by his theology. For him, all things flow out of, and toward, a future of absolute good;

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855 T. F. Torrance, 'Universalism or Election?', SCOTTISH JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY 2(1949): 314.

a totalitarianism of the future exerts a creative and eschatological conformism by which all reality is stamped with deterministic necessity. But we ask: Is not grace the surprising act of divine freedom? The holiness of God teaches us to view things in a more dynamic way, for it maintains the essential distinction between God and the world in which a living, vital relationship can exist, and yet as this relationship is one of grace, we are kept in the wonder and awe of the surprising gift of divine love. The grace of God is the judgment against sin in Jesus Christ; that this is the judgment of the 'wholly other' causes us to take with absolute seriousness the situation of humanity as it has turned its back on God. Forasmuch as this is accomplished in Christ, however, we are freed from debilitating guilt to turn to the perfect love which casts out fear. For the person who has looked into the black depths of his own perverted motives, been wearied by attempts to be the lord he is not, and experienced the consequent brokenness of his own being, for this person there is nothing 'automatic' about God's act of loving mercy in Christ Jesus. It is Good News - unpredictable, ego-shattering, and awe-inspiring. It creates the human response of faith.

This leads to a second point in our dialogue with Pannenberg: not only does holiness reveal sin, it establishes the human response of faith. This follows from the definition of the Holy, for as it is 'wholly other' through being 'wholly for,' the ontological separation of God from the human by his embrace of the human, something really does happen to humanity. The act of holiness is the concrete,

effectual overcoming of the barriers created by sin. A relationship is established; the creature finds himself drawn back to the Creator from whom he is fleeing. God accomplishes the event, and thus his absolute distinction is maintained according to the structure of grace; but this ontological distinction is the actual overcoming of the distance which does take place. The runaway returns. Fellowship is established.

What happens is this: the holiness of God is established in the midst of humanity. God shares the uniqueness of his being with others. He gives it, and so maintains his distinction, the prius of his grace; but he does give it, and humanity is enabled to participate in the love of God. By his act of reconciliation in Christ Jesus, God has judged human sin. He has stormed the barriers of separation. Thus his judgment is grace, the victory of God's will to fellowship over the sinner's will to autonomy. This is the act of holiness, the working out of the 'wholly for' which is the content of God's ontological 'otherness.' In Christ, a bridge has been erected by which humankind may cross over the gulf of division and enter into the fellowship of God's love and life.

And thus the biblical testimony is a summons: the sinner must respond with trust in this God of aggressive grace. Because holy love has effectively breached the barricades, because a wide path has been paved, the rebel must return. After God's choice

of us in Jesus Christ,

still to draw back in proud independence  
and selfish denial of God's love is an  
act of bottomless horror . . . . To  
choose our own way and yet in that choice  
still to be chosen by God would be hell. 856

Therefore, the apostolic call is for faith.

Since all have sinned and fall short of  
the glory of God, they are justified by  
his grace as a gift, through the redemption  
which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put  
forward as an expiation by his blood,  
to be received by faith. 857

Thus Paul can say that 'we are justified by faith,'<sup>858</sup> and he  
encourages the Colossians with the fact that they have been  
reconciled to God by the death of Christ provided they 'continue  
in the faith.'<sup>859</sup> There is nothing at all 'automatic' about the  
salvation of humanity in Christ: we are faced with a call to  
decide for the God who has decided for us. The summons is  
freighted with the full cargo of God's eternal love. To turn  
our back on it is the horror of death; to embrace it is life.  
'For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he  
confesses with his lips and so is saved.'<sup>860</sup>

By faith, then, persons enter into the sphere of God's act  
of holiness, they are united together as the body of the Holy One.  
Their lives are 'hid with Christ in God.'<sup>861</sup> We can put it this way:

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856 Ibid., p.317.

857 Rom. 3:23-25 (italics mine).

858 Rom. 5:1.

859 Col. 1:22-23.

860 Rom. 10:11.

861 Col. 3:3.

by faith, human beings complete the act of holiness. Inasmuch as God's holiness is the gracious bridging of the gulf to the end that divine-human fellowship may be established, faith is the follow-through of this action. It is the turning of the creature to his Creator. Because this is the aim of the grace of holiness, we say that this turning - faith - completes holiness. The sinner is taken up into the act of God's holiness in Christ Jesus, and his participation fulfils holiness.

Does this mean that God's holiness is dependent upon human action? Are we asserting the absurdity that God's 'otherness' is humanity's creation? Decidedly not. For the act of faith - the completion of holiness - is also God's act. It is part of the one complete act of holy love which distinguishes him from all other beings. It was explained to the Ephesians this way:

For by grace you have been saved through faith;  
and this is not your own doing, it is the gift  
of God - not because of works, lest any man  
should boast. 862

Faith itself is a work of God. Through the quickening of his Holy Spirit, human beings are empowered for the response which completes holiness. They believe and are saved; that is, they are united to Christ by faith and share in his being. They enter into his holiness; they are 'saints in Christ Jesus.' In this, holiness finds completion. Because it is all God's action, his 'wholly

otherness' is not threatened; rather, it is maintained and manifested. Yet, as a result of this wholly divine action, the Christian is incorporated into the Holy, he is granted existential participation in the holiness of God. Therefore the Church - the called-out ones - are holy, not of themselves, but because they have been swept up by the Spirit of Holiness into participation in the being of God and thus constituted a fellowship of the Holy.

This means that, even as God is ontologically distinct from the world, so also is his Church. The Church has a different being from that of the world. In spite of itself it is granted this new life in Christ. The congregatio fidelium is the congregatio sanctorum. Just as it is impossible to minimize the 'wholly other' aspect of God's holiness, so also do we err if the Church's distinctive being is minimized. The Church is ontologically distinct from the world, for it participates in the holiness of God. To deny this distinction is to deny the meaning of the Holy.

b. With a view to Pannenberg's theology we have emphasized that the Church's holiness is the consequence of God's grace in Jesus Christ. This has enabled us to take seriously the brokenness of sin and the Gospel's call for faith. Now, with Moltmann's theology in mind, it should be stressed that the Church's holiness is the consequence of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

Jürgen Moltmann shares with Pannenberg a concern to understand fully the eschatological implications of the Gospel.<sup>863</sup> But whereas

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863 See Chapter IV.



Pannenberg's is a theology motivated by a passion for wholeness, Moltmann's seeks to be more open-ended and to account for the brokenness of the present age. In the end, however, both arrive at a universalism which robs the Church of any ontological distinction between itself and the world. For this reason, the arguments presented against the universalism of Pannenberg are directly relevant to Moltmann, also; but now we shift the emphasis slightly.

Pannenberg's universalism is the result of his holistic view of reality, by which all things were part of a circular movement from God to God. In the face of this, it was necessary to insist on the reality of grace - God's free gift in response to the brokenness of human sin. With Moltmann, however, the problem is somewhat different. He recognizes the reality of sin and the brokenness of the present age. And, with the controlling concept of promise, he juxtaposes this age and the next as contradictory realities. If this age is under the sign of the cross, the age to come is promised by the resurrection. As God took all sin into himself in the cross, so in the resurrection all reality is given the promise of life. Though Moltmann intends to have an eschatology which is more open-ended than Pannenberg's, it in fact becomes nearly as universal and 'automatic,' for Moltmann believes that one can extrapolate from the 'inner tendency' of the Christ event to arrive at a picture (though of course incomplete) of the future. Forasmuch as God, in the cross, absorbed into himself all the death-dealing sin of the present, this means for Moltmann that the resurrection of Christ promises life to all in the coming eschaton.

Since he contends, further, that essence is determined by the eschaton (that is, the being of a thing is ordained by its future), this can only mean the dissolution of any ontological differentiation of present phenomena, for the 'inner tendency' of the Christ event points to an end of universal restoration.

In dialogue with Moltmann, therefore, it is necessary to accentuate the fact that the Church has its being in Christ. With his eschatological focus and stress on the promissory nature of revelation, Moltmann risks locating the essence of the Church in the future, rather than in the One under whose headship it exists as body. With his notion of the eschatological determination of essence, Moltmann has no option but to derive the nature of the being of the Church - indeed, all reality - from the future. The 'horizon of meaning' for the Church and the world is the same: the coming eschaton. Thus the Church cannot be essentially different from the rest of reality. Any distinctiveness it may bear is only that of its particular function in relation to the eschaton. The Church, for Moltmann, 'is characterized as an instrumental function of the apostolic process of God's history.'<sup>864</sup> That is to say, it is not set apart from the world because of what it is, but only because of what it does. Its task is the missionary function of bearing witness to the future of all creation. It is at the vanguard of the eschatological movement of creation, and thus is in a unique position to serve the future by working for 'the qualitative

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864 Moltmann, HOPE AND PLANNING, p.145.

alteration of life's atmosphere'<sup>865</sup> by infecting others with the spirit of hope and love, with 'Christian ideas, values and principles.'<sup>866</sup> The vague tone of this description of the Church's missionary work is a clue to the difficulty with Moltmann's ecclesiology: the Church, for him, has its meaning in a future only vaguely knowable through extrapolation from the 'inner tendency' of the Christ event.

The doctrine of holiness, however, disallows any attempt to understand the being and action of the Church apart from Jesus Christ. Ecclesia sancta means: a Church which is the fellowship of the Holy; that is, a Church constituted in the act of holiness in Jesus Christ, and a Church which has its being in this Holy One. It is holy only because it shares, by grace, in his holiness. Because it owes its existence to the One who is the holiness of God - the concrete embodiment of the 'wholly other' which is the 'wholly for' - it can look nowhere else but to him as it seeks to understand the nature of its life and witness. Its essence and work are not defined by the future, or a principle; its life is 'hid with Christ in God.'<sup>867</sup>

Moreover, this means that both its being and its action are the consequence of its engrafting into Christ. As we have already seen, holiness is the distinctiveness of love. Even as God is

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865 Moltmann, CPS, p.152.

866 Ibid., p.162.

867 Col. 3:3.

'wholly other' - ontologically distinct - precisely in that he is 'wholly for,' so also is the Church. Because it is grounded in Christ, there can be no split between the Church's essence and activity. Its being is its act. The communio sanctorum participates in the holiness of God in Christ Jesus, and thus the distinctiveness of its being is its action of love. It is as it does the work of self-giving love, and it does this as it is in Christ; neither one nor the other may be minimized without doing violence to the Church's holiness.

By locating the being of the Church in the eschaton, Moltmann not only sweeps aside all ontological distinctions, but also contradicts the character of the Holy. Distinction, separation, set-apartness - these are all fundamental to holiness; yet this 'wholly other' quality may be understood in a way which does not condemn the Church to irrelevance in the contemporary world. What distinguishes it, ontologically, is its participation in the servanthood of Christ. As it shares his being it shares his act. Thus in him it is distinct, but in such a way that it cannot live without the world but only for the world.

And what of the future, which is of such importance for Moltmann? Whatever life may be like in the eschaton, we can only say that it will be life in Christ. We may not look around Christ to another age, the character of which we seek to outline according to the 'tendencies' in the Christ event of this age. The future for which the Church hopes is the future of Jesus Christ; it does not look forward to the arrival of an abstract eschaton, but to the coming of its Lord.

His future is the Church's future. 'When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory,'<sup>868</sup> the Colôssians were told.

The Church, accordingly, will possess a genuine openness in its hope for the future. This was Moltmann's intention, but by reasoning from what he believed was implied in the event of Christ's death and resurrection, he arrived at a rather closed view of the eschaton. Because he understood Good Friday as a symbol of this age, and Easter, in strict contradiction, as a sign of the age to come, he boldly argued for the universal restoration of all reality. But if the Church is waiting for the future of Christ, it will be cautious about guaranteeing an automatic redemption of all reality. What it can say about the eschaton is that it will be the future of Jesus Christ. This means it will be an act of God's freedom, and thus we are not able to seize upon a 'law' which makes certain a definite issue of history. And it will be an event of grace which is not divorced from judgment. In its Lord, the Church has beheld the paradoxical unity of judgment and grace, the overcoming of a conflict between God and humanity. It is in Christ that it knows this, and this is its release from insecurity: in him it possesses the salvation granted to it in virtue of his standing in its place to receive the condemnation it deserved. But for this reason, it will look only to him, and not to something beyond him. It can

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868 Col. 3:4.

only take with great seriousness the fact that while Scripture certainly has passages that point to universal restoration,<sup>869</sup> it also has many other passages which declare in no uncertain terms that at the last judgment there will be a final division between the children of light and the children of darkness.<sup>870</sup> 'There is not a shred of Biblical witness that can be adduced to support the impossibility of ultimate damnation. All the weight of Biblical teaching is on the other side.'<sup>871</sup> The Church must take this witness seriously because of its Lord's descent into the hell of godforsakenness: the words 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' on the lips of the Crucified One forbid any complacency about the wrath of God against sin. By faith it trusts that the judgment he experienced unto death was its own, and thus also grace, but accordingly it can look neither to the right nor to the left; it cannot speculate about the eternal outcome of those who resolutely refuse to be joined to Christ by faith. At most, it may hope that the abundance of God's grace may perhaps reach even those who are not obstinate in their refusal of grace, but it is able to make no dogmatic statements. Exactly how God's grace and judgment will be worked out at the end of history for those who foolishly flee from the loving pursuit of the 'Hound of Heaven,' the Church

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869 E.g., Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:20; Phil. 2:10-11.

870 E.g., Matt. 25:41; Mk. 9:42-49; Jn. 3:36; II Thess. 1:6-10; Heb. 2:3; 10:26-31; Rev. 20:11-15.

871 Torrance, 'Universalism or Election?', p.313.

does not know. For its part, however, it will look only to Christ, in whom, it trusts, is found the final unity of judgment and grace. Thus the Church's hope is open, awaiting Jesus Christ in the freedom of his grace; and the Church's hope is confident, awaiting Jesus Christ in the freedom of his grace. As it hopes in him, it hopes for nothing less than its own future, for its being is united with the being of the coming Lord.

Therefore, against both Pannenberg and Moltmann, it must be firmly asserted that the Church is ontologically distinct from the world, for it shares in the distinctive being of the Holy One. This distinction may not be crushed under the wheels of a universalism which pulls in its train an ontological conformism admitting only functional differences between the Church and the world. Rather, the Church must be seized anew by the implications of its creed, credo sanctam ecclesiam. The Church is separate from the world - separate in the loss of its self for the world.

(2) In the last chapter, it was pointed out that the theology of Karl Barth proves to be an effective ally in the fight to maintain the proper distinction between God and humanity - a distinction implicit in the notion of holiness. To conclude this chapter, I shall again call upon the reserve forces of this theology. Here, too, it will become evident that Barth, by consistently defending the structure of grace implicit in holiness, has preserved the ontological distinction between the Church and the world.

a. The early stages of Barth's theological labours were like the razing of an old, dilapidated building which was unable to shelter a generation battered by the storms of World War I. The structure of nineteenth century liberalism, with foundations precariously anchored in the insecure sands of anthropocentrism, needed to be laid waste in order to 'let God be God.' So Barth set to work with a theological wrecking ball forged in the fire of the Holy. By underscoring the diastasis between a holy God and sinful humanity, Barth aimed to bring the roof down on a house whose timbers had long ago been rotted out by theological subjectivism, the enfeebling cor curvum in se of an era stewing in the juices of its own religious experiences and moralistic fervour.<sup>872</sup>

Eventually, this necessary work of destruction was followed, in Barth's thought, by the work of construction. After the ground had been cleared by the dialectical juxtaposing of God and humanity in antithesis, Barth began the process of rebuilding by taking up a different tool; by means of analogy, Barth sought to understand fully the implications for all reality of the fact that the holy-profane antithesis consists precisely in the grace of its overcoming. As Barth restructured theology's house, he attempted to follow as consistently as possible the architectural blueprints for a building with 'Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together.'<sup>873</sup> Accordingly, his

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872 For a fuller discussion of the early theology of Karl Barth, see Chapter V.

873 Eph. 2:20-21.



emphasis shifted: the negative notes of his early strains were modulated into the fortissimo of a fully positive theology. Jesus Christ became his constant theme, and like a great symphony, Barth's massive CHURCH DOGMATICS has this theme as both its constant motif and the keystone of its structural unity. His theology is simply the passionate endeavour to comprehend all that is revealed about God and his creation in the name of Jesus Christ.

This 'christological concentration' leads to that mode of thought in Barth which he himself has termed intensive universalism. It is both intensive and universal because it sees the entire history of the world and of salvation as comprehended in a single point, and develops it from this point. That God and man are united in Jesus Christ is the central fact, the basis and explanation of everything that is decreed in eternity and takes place within time. 874

Thus christology, for Barth, is not one part (alongside others) of theology, but all theology, in so far as it is Christian, is christology; that is, all theological formulations must necessarily be grounded in the concrete revelation of God in Jesus Christ. John Thompson has rightly observed that in Barth's theology

there is no Christology as such; on the other hand, it is all Christology. By this we mean the following. It is an interesting but a significant fact that there is no such thing as a section of Christology as such in the whole of Karl Barth's writings. Yet it is christological through and through. This is due to the fact that Barth's theology as a whole and in every part is determined by its relation to Jesus Christ, his being and action,

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874 Zahrnt, THE QUESTION OF GOD, p.95. The use of the word 'universalism' in this quote should be understood as indicating the comprehensive scope of God's work in Christ, but not in the sense that I have used it earlier in this thesis, i.e., as meaning an 'automatic' issue of human history.

so that one cannot detach any aspect from its christological basis. 875

Though christology is omnipresent in the entire CHURCH DOGMATICS, nowhere is its decisive importance for Barth more apparent than in his doctrine of reconciliation. Here he deals with, in his words, the 'centre of all Christian knowledge,' and therefore he recognizes that, 'to fail here is to fail everywhere. To be on the right track here makes it impossible to be completely mistaken in the whole.'<sup>876</sup> To stay on the right track, Barth devoted himself wholly to the explication of the name of Jesus Christ.<sup>877</sup> The result is a theology of both massive breadth and breathtaking simplicity - 'simple' in the sense that it is the constant reiteration of one theme, Jesus Christ, but in scope as universal as the eternal reality of God and his dealings with humanity.

It is impossible to summarize justly Barth's doctrine of reconciliation without doing violence to its architectonic beauty; but just as his earlier theology provided an alternative to the

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875 John Thompson, CHRIST IN PERSPECTIVE - CHRISTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES IN THE THEOLOGY OF KARL BARTH (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1978), p.1.

876 Barth, CD IV/1, p.ix.

877 Shortly before his death, Barth took part in a Swiss radio broadcast, in which he ended with these words: '"The last word which I have to say as a theologian and also as a politician is not a term like 'grace,' but a name, 'Jesus Christ.' He is grace, and he is the last, beyond the world and the church and even theology . . . What I have been concerned to do in my long life has been increasingly to emphasize this name and say: There is no salvation in any other name than this. For grace, too, is there. There, too, is the impulse to work, to struggle, and also the impulse towards fellowship, towards human solidarity. Everything that I have tested in my life, in weakness and in foolishness, is there. But it is there"' (as quoted in Eberhard Busch, KARL BARTH, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1976), p.496).

immanentalism of Bonhoeffer and Tillich, so this final stage of his thought presents a clear option to the universalism (and its attendant problems) we found with Pannenberg and Moltmann - an alternative, moreover, which more adequately accords with the biblical and theological implications of holiness. Therefore, in spite of the difficulties, an attempt must be made to explain concisely what Barth understands to have taken place between God and humanity in the event of Jesus Christ.

b. Barth himself condenses into two paragraphs the contents of several thousand pages of theological exposition:

The content of the doctrine of reconciliation is the knowledge of Jesus Christ who is (1) very God, that is, the God who humbles Himself, and therefore the reconciling God, (2) very man, that is, man exalted and therefore reconciled by God, and (3) in the unity of the two the guarantor and witness of our atonement.

This knowledge of Jesus Christ includes the knowledge of the sin of man: (1) his pride, (2) his sloth and (3) his falsehood - the knowledge of the event in which reconciliation is made: (1) his justification, (2) his sanctification and (3) his calling - and the knowledge of the work of the Holy Spirit in (1) the gathering, (2) the upbuilding and (3) the sending of the community, and of the being of the Christians in Jesus Christ (1) in faith, (2) in love and (3) in hope. 878

From the above quotation, it is clear that Barth begins with the fact that in Jesus Christ 'we have to do wholly with God and wholly with man, and with both in their complete and utter unity.'<sup>879</sup> And what takes place in this being and history of Jesus Christ is

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878 Ibid., p.79.

879 Ibid., p.126.

atonement. 'His being as God and man and God-man consists in the complete act of reconciliation of man with God.'<sup>880</sup> Notice his wording: 'His being . . . consists in the completed act.' Barth refuses to follow the way of traditional christology in distinguishing between the person (being) and work (act) of Christ. That Jesus is both God and man is known only in his work; and the meaning of the divine action in him cannot be understood without reference to what took place in his being as God and man.<sup>881</sup>

In order to elucidate this being and act of God manifest in Jesus Christ, Barth follows the munus triplex arrangement of Reformation christology - but with a significant difference. He does not distinguish between Christ's offices as prophet, priest, and king by assigning them to specific stages of his existence. For Barth, Christ was not first a prophet as he proclaimed the kingdom of God, then a priest as he offered himself as an atonement for the sins of the world, and finally a king as he ascended to rule at the right hand of God the Father. Rather, in the complete unitary action of his incarnation, death, and resurrection Jesus Christ is the priest who effectively establishes reconciliation between God and fallen humanity, the king who reigns as exalted man, and in the unity of these two, the prophet who has proclaimed, and continues to proclaim, this Word of God revealed in his being and act. Thus also Barth does not separate the humiliation and exaltation of Christ into

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880 Ibid., p.127.

881 Ibid., p.133.

two distinct periods, one following the other, but sees in the one divine work of grace in Jesus Christ both, and at the same time, the humiliation of God and the exaltation of man.

1. That Jesus Christ is very God is shown in the fact that he made his way into the far country; the Lord became a servant.

Inasmuch as the being of God is one with his act of revelation in Jesus Christ, we know the meaning of deity, not from any abstract notions of a supreme, absolute, non-worldly being.

It can be learned only from what took place in Christ . . . . the mirror in which it can be known (and is known) that He is God, and of the divine nature, is His becoming flesh and His existence in the flesh. 882

This means that the obedience of the Son to the Father - shown in his self-humiliation, his journey into the far country inhabited by sinful humanity - enclosed within itself 'the mystery that He is very God.'<sup>883</sup> God does not, according to Barth, lay aside his divinity to become a man (he rejects kenotic theology), for

God is always God even in His humiliation. The divine being does not suffer any change, any diminution, any transformation into something else, any admixture with something else, let alone any cessation. 884

Who God is, is something that we can only learn in the school of Christ; what it means to be divine can be known only where God has revealed himself. And so, if he has revealed himself in Christ,

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882 Ibid., p.177.

883 Ibid.

884 Ibid., p.179.

'we have to be ready to be taught by Him that we have been too small and perverted in our thinking about Him within the framework of a false idea of God.'<sup>885</sup> What he reveals to us is that for him 'it is just as natural to be lowly as it is to be high, to be near as it is to be far, to be little as it is to be great, to be abroad as it is to be at home.'<sup>886</sup>

As the Son of God came into this world, he came as Judge. 'He is the One whose concern is for order and peace, who must uphold the right and prevent the wrong.'<sup>887</sup> In so doing, he reveals to the world its sin, for sin 'has its being and origin in the fact that man wants to be his own judge.'<sup>888</sup> The world wants to justify itself, to assert pridefully its autonomous independence from God. For this reason, the incarnation of the Son of God means judgment, rejection, and condemnation against all flesh.<sup>889</sup> But God, in the freedom of his grace, passed full judgment on humanity in a way that provided, at the same time, the world's pardon.<sup>890</sup> Christ reveals the Deus pro nobis, in that as Judge he himself

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885 Ibid., p.186.

886 Ibid., p.192. Cf. C. G. Jung, MEMORIES, DREAMS, REFLECTIONS, ed. Aniela Jaffé, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (London: Collins; Fount Paperbacks Reprint, 1977), p.388: 'There is a fine story about a student who came to a rabbi and said, "In olden days there were men who saw the face of God. Why don't they any more?" The rabbi replied, "Because nowadays no one can stoop so low."'

887 Barth, CD IV/1, p.217.

888 Ibid., p.220.

889 Ibid.

890 Ibid., p.222.

took our place: he removed us from the judgment seat (this means our abasement but also our liberation from a burden we cannot bear)<sup>891</sup>; and he accepted responsibility for our sin by taking upon himself the judgment we deserve for our arrogant usurpation of the unlawful place we tried to occupy.<sup>892</sup>

The decisive thing is not that He has suffered what we ought to have suffered so that we do not have to suffer it, the destruction to which we have fallen victim by guilt, and therefore punishment which we deserve. This is true, of course. But it is true only as it derives from the decisive thing that in the suffering and death of Jesus Christ it has come to pass that in His own person He has made an end of us as sinners and therefore sin itself by going to death as the One who took our place as sinners. In His person He has delivered up us sinners and sin itself to destruction. 893

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the Father's verdict on the Son's act of obedience: it is the announcement that the Son's self-humiliation unto death is accepted as 'the justification of God Himself . . . who has willed and planned and ordered this event,' the justification of Jesus Christ 'who willed to suffer this event,' and 'the justification of all sinful men, whose death was decided in this event.'<sup>894</sup> In the concrete event of Christ's

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891 Ibid., pp.231-35.

892 Ibid., pp.235-83.

893 Ibid., p.253. Barth recognizes that there are images other than forensic used in the Scripture to speak of the reconciliation accomplished in Christ. See pp.273-83, where he acknowledges that he could as easily have employed the terminology of the cultic. Thus, the crucial thing for Barth is not the particular image, but the fact that in Christ God has effectively encountered and overcome the resistance of sin.

894 Ibid., p.309.

resurrection<sup>895</sup> is shown that the 'No' of God's judgment is not independent, but enclosed in his 'Yes' of grace. 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'<sup>896</sup> This victory is made provisionally manifest in the Easter event, but because the living Christ is not only the One who has come, and is present, but also is to come, we look forward to the final fulfilment of this revelation. And in this interval between the first and final parousia, the community of Christ is given existence in this world.<sup>897</sup>

Because Jesus Christ is the full Word of God, revealing not only the being of God but also the being of humanity, his act of atonement reveals both the grace of God and the sin of the world. We have no autonomous knowledge of sin apart from Christ, for access to the knowledge of our sin is lacking precisely because we are sinners.<sup>898</sup> Theology errs, according to Barth, when it seeks a knowledge of sin in the knowledge of God in his majesty as Creator and Ruler of the world, in the demand with which he confronts humanity in history, as distinct from his presence, action, and revelation in Jesus Christ. 'A division of God into a god in Christ and a god outside Christ is quite impossible.'<sup>899</sup>

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895 Barth contends that the resurrection happened in fact, and it was this event which gave birth to Easter faith and not vice versa. See *ibid.*, p.333.

896 *Ibid.*, p.349.

897 *Ibid.*, p.353.

898 *Ibid.*, p.361.

899 *Ibid.*, p.363. For this reason, Barth reverses the traditional order of 'Law and Gospel,' and speaks rather of 'Gospel and Law.' See Karl Barth, GOD, GRACE AND GOSPEL, trans. James S. McNab (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1959; Scottish Journal of Theology Occasional Papers No.8), pp.1-27.



The order of knowing, therefore, is not from the sickness to the cure, but from the cure to the sickness. If the remedy was the self-abasement of the Son of God as he accepted judgment against himself, then 'the sin of man is the pride of man.'<sup>900</sup> Humanity's struggle to be its own lord, to justify itself, is revealed in the medicine of the Lord becoming a servant. 'The fact that Jesus Christ died totally for the reconciliation of every man as such, for the man who exists in this way, means decisively that this corruption is both radical and total'; sin entails the consequent perversion of the whole person.<sup>901</sup>

Nevertheless, however total a person's depravity may be 'the wrong of man cannot in any way alter the right of God.'<sup>902</sup>

Man may fall. Indeed he necessarily falls, and into the abyss, when he sets himself in the wrong against God. But in this fall into the abyss he cannot fall out of the sphere of God and therefore out of the right which God has over him . . . . even in the lowest depths of hell, whatever that may mean for him, he is still the man whom God has elected and created, and as such he is in the hand of God. He has not escaped the right of God over him, and to him, but is still subjected to it, utterly and completely. He is still in the sphere of God's jurisdiction. 903

And God has caused his right to prevail - in Jesus Christ.

The journey of the Son of God into the far country was the maintenance of God's righteousness over against the sin of humanity,

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900 Barth, CD IV/1, p.413.

901 Ibid., p.492.

902 Ibid., p.534.

903 Ibid.

and his righteousness is the rule of his grace.<sup>904</sup> God first justified himself by securing his will over humanity and judging it for its rejection and despising of his grace; but since God justified himself in Christ, the sinner, too, is justified. God's judgment is grace and his grace judgment. The result: 'Pardon - by God and therefore unconditionally pronounced and unconditionally valid - that is man's justification.'<sup>905</sup> This does not mean that the justified person is no longer a sinner. Even though he is already righteous before God, he is still sinful; but

the new thing which comes from God has as such precedence over the old man. The right which is ascribed to him by God has as such precedence over his own wrong. His life has precedence over death . . . . The completion of justification has precedence over its commencement. 906

What remains for us to do by way of response? Simply this: to accept by faith God's work pro nobis. Faith is not another work by which we can justify ourselves; quite the contrary. It is the humble acknowledgment of God's work. Faith 'knows and grasps and realizes the justification of man as the decision and act and word of God.'<sup>907</sup>

2. In the first part of his doctrine of reconciliation, Barth focuses on the movement from God to humanity. As the Son of God obediently journeyed into the far country of sin, he accomplished

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904 Ibid., p.538.

905 Ibid., p.568.

906 Ibid., p.591.

907 Ibid., p.631.

by his self-humiliation the justification of prideful humanity. In the second part of his doctrine of reconciliation, Barth concentrates on a second movement which also took place in the being and act of Jesus Christ. The atonement accomplished in Jesus Christ is the one event of the going out of the Son of God and the coming in of the Son of Man.<sup>908</sup> The humbling of the Son of God is also - at the same time - the exaltation of the Son of Man.

Jesus Christ is vere Deus and vere homo. What does this vere homo mean? It means, Barth tells us, that his humanity is 'both completely like and yet also completely unlike that of all other men.'<sup>909</sup>

He is man. He is man totally and unreservedly as we are. He is our Brother in which each of us can and may recognize himself as His brother, but also recognize the form and aspect of every other man . . . 910

On the other hand, he is also completely unlike us in that he is not simply a man, but the true man. He is decisively different from us in the fact that 'in His human existence . . . there took place an exaltation of the humanity which as His and ours is the same.'<sup>911</sup>

Now inasmuch as the Son of God assumed into unity with himself not merely 'a man' (that is, a specific individual) but 'the humanum, the being and essence of man,'<sup>912</sup> this means that 'in

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908 Barth, CD IV/2, p.21.

909 Ibid., p.27.

910 Ibid.

911 Ibid., p.28.

912 Ibid., p.48.

Him, in this man, we have to do with the exaltation of the essence common to all men.'<sup>913</sup> This does not involve the divinisation of human essence, however. It means that human essence 'is set in perfect fellowship with the divine essence.'<sup>914</sup> As 'true man,' Jesus was exalted.

Exaltation to what? To that harmony with the divine will, that service of the divine act, that correspondence to the divine grace, that state of thankfulness, which is the only possibility in view of the fact that this man is determined by this divine will and act and grace alone, and by them brought in His existence into not merely indirect but direct and indestructible confrontation with the divine essence. 915

That is to say, Jesus was exalted to true human freedom, and therefore he was without sin.<sup>916</sup>

It is important to realize that for Barth 'it is the act of the humiliation of the Son of God as such which is the exaltation of the Son of Man, and in Him of human essence.'<sup>917</sup> The exaltation of man takes place precisely in the humiliation of God. The resurrection and ascension are not the exaltation of Christ, but are the events of his self-declaration.

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913 Ibid., p.69. For Barth's defence and explanation of the unio hypostatica including his discussion of the communicatio idiomatum, see pp.49-116.

914 Ibid., p.72.

915 Ibid., p.92.

916 Ibid.

917 Ibid., p.100.

As His self-revelation, His resurrection and ascension were simply a lifting of the veil . . . . The authentic communication and proclamation of the perfect act of redemption once for all accomplished in His previous existence and history, of the Word of salvation once for all spoken in Him. 918

Sanctification, no less than justification, is an objective, universal event. There is no one who is exempt from this turning to God which was accomplished in Jesus Christ. 'There is no one who is not raised and exalted with him to true humanity.'<sup>919</sup> 'There is no sinful man who is not affected and determined with and by His existence.'<sup>920</sup>

Yet this sanctification is not only an objective, external event extra nos; it is also a subjective, internal event intra nos. The power for this inner change of direction comes from without, but its effect is experienced in the centre of a person's being. What happens is this: men and women become Christians. How is it possible that this inner re-direction of being takes place?

If we are to think and speak in New Testament terms the answer can only be that, deriving from Jesus Christ, i.e., His resurrection, there is a sovereignly operative power of revelation, and therefore of the transition from Him to us, of His communion with us; a power by whose working there is revealed and made known to us our own election as it has taken place in Him, His humiliation as the Son of God as it has occurred for us, but also His exaltation as the Son of Man as it has also occurred for us, therefore the deliverance and establishment of our own

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918 Ibid., p.133.

919 Ibid., p.271.

920 Ibid., p.281.

being, so that our existence receives a new determination. It is by the operation of this power that we become and are Christians. 921

This power is the 'outgoing and receiving and presence and action of the Holy Spirit.'<sup>922</sup> It is the power of Jesus Christ - his Spirit; for the Holy Spirit 'is no other than the presence and action of Jesus Christ Himself.'<sup>923</sup>

If this exaltation of the Son of Man, and with him, all humanity, is the remedy, what is the disease? In the light of the new man introduced in Jesus Christ, Barth's answer now is that 'the sin of man is the sloth of man.'<sup>924</sup> Sin is not only the evil action of pride, but also the evil inaction of sloth. Marked by stupidity,<sup>925</sup> inhumanity,<sup>926</sup> dissipation,<sup>927</sup> and human care,<sup>928</sup> it is the refusal to be truly human. Wallowing in the mud of its own indolence, humanity exists in the misery of its status corruptionis.<sup>929</sup>

Again, the cure was an effective medicine for this 'sickness unto death.' The liberation of persons from this misery has been accomplished in the 'new man,' Jesus Christ, who in an act of free

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921 Ibid., p.318.

922 Ibid., p.319.

923 Ibid., pp.322-23.

924 Ibid., p.403.

925 Ibid., pp.411-32.

926 Ibid., pp.432-52.

927 Ibid., p.452-67.

928 Ibid., p.467-83.

929 Ibid., p.487.

will, the decision of liberum arbitrium, offered complete obedience to the will of God the Father.<sup>930</sup>

It has not always been taken with sufficient seriousness that He took our place and acted for us, not merely as the Son of God who established God's right and our own by allowing Himself, the Judge, to be judged for us, but also as the Son of Man who was sanctified, who sanctified Himself . . . . This means, however, that in and with His sanctification ours has been achieved as well. What remains for us is simply to recognize and respect it with gratitude in that provisional praise, the offering of which is the reason for the existence of His people, His community and all its individual members. 931

3. Justification and sanctification are two sides of the one event of atonement in Jesus Christ. But this intrinsically perfect action has a distinct character: 'as it takes place in its perfection, and with no need of supplement, it also expresses, discloses, mediates and reveals itself.'<sup>932</sup> This, then, is the third dimension of Barth's doctrine of reconciliation. Its presence at the end of the CHURCH DOGMATICS is perhaps the logical consequence of a theology consistently unified in its emphasis on the Word of God. Nonetheless, it has about it something surprising and yet satisfying; its originality is striking, but once presented it seems as indispensable as a leg on a three-legged stool.

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930 Ibid., pp.405-98.

931 Ibid., p.516.

932 Barth, CD IV/3, p.8.

What Barth is saying is this: reconciliation is not only real, but true; it not only is, but shows that it is; it not only is a fact, but it proves its factuality in the enlightening work of the Holy Spirit. Reconciliation is the justification and sanctification of humanity, and it is the 'disclosure, declaration and impartation' of this event.<sup>933</sup> The reason this is so is because the One in whom reconciliation has taken place now lives. Jesus Christ speaks for himself, is his own authentic witness. 'He grounds and summons and creates knowledge of Himself and His life, making it actual and therefore possible.'<sup>934</sup>

As the one Word of God,<sup>935</sup> Jesus is engaged in a great historical drama, a conflict which is genuine though the outcome will assuredly be his victory.<sup>936</sup> In the war with

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933 Ibid., p.11.

934 Ibid., p.46.

935 Barth clearly desires to preserve the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the 'one and only' Word of God. He allows no diminution of, or competition with, his transcendent authority. However, it is interesting, in light of his life-long battle against 'natural theology,' that Barth discusses at length the relationship between the one Word of God and all other words. These 'other words' have an independent existence and proper place, he affirms, but they are only given this place in Jesus Christ. They are grounded in the one Word. Therefore, he rules out both monism and dualism, and seeks to recognise both the sovereignty of grace and the glory of creation. See *ibid.*, pp.110-65.

936 Ibid., pp.165-274.



evil,<sup>937</sup> it is not a matter of 'the triumph of grace' or any other principle<sup>938</sup>: the aggressor is the living person, Jesus Christ, who as Light overcomes the darkness, as Revealer defeats ignorance and falsehood, as Life destroys death.

This conquering Word of grace is spoken to the world, first and foremost, in the resurrection. This event is

the primal and basic form of His glory,  
of the outgoing and shining of His light,  
of His expression, of His Word as His self-  
expression, and therefore of His outgoing  
and penetration and entry into the world  
around ourselves, of His prophetic work. 939

This Easter proclamation was issued 'with all the power of God and therefore once for all, totally, universally, radically and with definitive newness.'<sup>940</sup> Thus it was an eschatological

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937 Barth refers to evil as 'nothingness,' and has been criticized for it (see e.g., Berkouwer, THE TRIUMPH OF GRACE IN THE THEOLOGY OF KARL BARTH); however, by that term, he does not mean that it is unreal, but that next to God's 'positivity' it exists as 'negativity': 'when I speak of nothingness, I cannot mean that evil is nothing, that it does not exist, or that it has no reality. I mean that it exists only in the negativity proper to it in its relationship to God and decisively in God's relationship of repudiation to it. It does not exist as God does, not as His creatures, amongst which it is not to be numbered. It has no basis for being. It has no right to the existence which to our sorrow we cannot deny to it. Its existence, significance and reality are not distinguished by any value nor positive strength. The nature underlying its existence and activity is perversion. Its right to be and to express itself is simply that of wrong. In this sense it is nothingness' (Barth CD IV/3, p.178).

938 Ibid., p.173. For Barth's response to Berkouwer's book, THE TRIUMPH OF GRACE IN THE THEOLOGY OF KARL BARTH, see pp.173-80.

939 Barth, CD IV/3, p.281.

940 Ibid., p.323.

event, the parousia of Christ. According to Barth, there are three forms of the parousia: the Easter event, the impartation of the Holy Spirit, and the return of Jesus Christ as the goal of history. 'In all these forms it is one event. Nothing different takes place in any of them.'<sup>941</sup> This threefold appearance is the new coming of the One who had come before, and by his coming he declares his Word of reconciliation.

Now inasmuch as the resurrection has already taken place, this means that his self-declaration, 'to us and all men, has taken place once for all and irrevocably.'<sup>942</sup> This Word was not spoken in a heavenly or supra-heavenly realm, or simply as part of a divine conversation, 'but before the gates of Jerusalem in the days of Tiberius Caesar,'<sup>943</sup> in our time and place. Because this 'prophecy' of Jesus Christ is a 'divine noetic which has all the force of a divine ontic'<sup>944</sup> (that is, as God's Word it is an effective Word), the world's condition is no longer the same.

It has been given a new determination by the kingdom of God, for

what came upon the world and man in the resurrection of the man Jesus, in His appearance in the glory of God, was this presence of its future salvation ordained as the fruit of its reconciliation. 945

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941 Ibid., p.293.

942 Ibid., p.296.

943 Ibid., p.298.

944 Ibid., p.297.

945 Ibid., p.316.

If this is so, we may well ask, then why the time in-between? If the future has appeared in Jesus Christ's resurrection, then why did it not come in immediate fulfilment? If Christ has come again, then why do we live in a time still marked by conflict with evil and hope for his future return? The answer, Barth tells us, is that it is the Lord's good will 'to act and show Himself as Victor in the fight against darkness,'<sup>946</sup> to give himself time and space for combat, and to procure for the creation the time and space not only to witness, but actively to participate with him in his work and 'share in the harvest which follows from the sowing of reconciliation.'<sup>947</sup> As the 'True Witness' to his act of reconciliation, Jesus Christ calls us to join in this Word of witness. Thus the Word which effectively confirms to us the reality of our justification and sanctification in him, is also an irresistible summons to be engaged with him in his continuing witness.

We could summarize this third part of Barth's doctrine of reconciliation this way: Jesus Christ not only accomplishes our justification and sanctification, he tells us so; this witness took place at his resurrection and continues to take place because of his resurrection, that is, because he is the living Lord; this witness is effective, and when it encounters us, it claims us for the sphere and service of his truth.

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946 Ibid., p.330.

947 Ibid., p.331.

The sin revealed by this aspect of the work of grace in Christ is falsehood. 'If pride and sloth are the works, falsehood is the word of the man of sin.'<sup>948</sup> Human falsehood is the great enemy which resists the promise of God declared in the prophetic work of Christ. It consists in a movement of evasion from the truth. It excels in its own dishonesty when it uses the truth to silence the truth, when it affirms Jesus Christ by championing him as its

Hero, Example and Symbol, yet all the time patronizing, interpreting, domesticating, and gently but very definitely and significantly correcting Him. 949

Why should the truth be feared and thus evaded? Because the truth is not an idea, but a person, Jesus Christ, and therefore when a person encounters the truth he encounters the scandalous form of 'the man of Gethsemane and Golgotha, and therefore the truth of His death and passion.'<sup>950</sup> Like a tornado, this truth sweeps away all assurances, props, and supports of self-justification, and a person is left stripped of all reservations and excuses regarding his relationship with God, and he is deprived of any place where he might hold himself aloof from God and secure a place of his own.<sup>951</sup> Thus he seeks refuge in falsehood; but it is his condemnation. He becomes a lie, deformed in being, and he is forced to live with a distorted image of reality.<sup>952</sup>

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948 Ibid., p.373.

949 Ibid., p.437.

950 Ibid., p.441.

951 Ibid., p.447.

952 Ibid., p.468.

Once again, however, the grace of God is sufficient. Not only has God sanctified and justified humanity in Christ Jesus, he has also called all persons to turn from this falsehood to the truth, and to enter its service as a co-witness with Jesus Christ, to enter the ministerium Verbi divini. Though 'there are countless men whose justification, sanctification and vocation in the history of Jesus Christ have not yet taken place in their own history,'<sup>953</sup> there is no one who can be neutral in relation to Jesus Christ. For all are reconciled in him:

no man is rejected, but all are elected in Him to their justification, their sanctification and also their vocation. This is their prior history which precedes and underlies the event of vocation in their own history, which is purely and totally divine, but which in intention is already divine-human. 954

c. In the exposition of Barth's theology to this point, the objective, external nature of God's reconciliation in Christ has been stressed. We shall eventually return to Barth's theology in order to consider his understanding of the subjective, internal character of the event of divine grace, but now we pause briefly to consider his thought in relation to the doctrine of holiness in general, and Pannenberg and Moltmann's theologies in particular.

1. Holiness, we have shown, presupposes its opposite.

As the distinction which is the overcoming of the distance, its obvious corollary is that there is a distance to be overcome. It

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953 Ibid., p.486.

954 Ibid.

is holiness itself, as God's act of grace in Jesus Christ, which reveals the reality of sin. For this reason, it was necessary to criticize Pannenberg's holistic system which failed to account adequately for the brokenness of sin.

In this regard, therefore, does not Barth's theology offer us a more acceptable alternative? With his 'christological concentration,' Barth encountered the objective reality of grace in Jesus Christ. In thinking through the meaning of this event, and discovering in it the humiliation of the Son of God, the exaltation of the Son of Man, and the prophetic mediation of the Word of this God-man, Barth had to reckon with what it was that was overcome by the grace of God. From Christ, therefore, he learned the nature of sin. If the humiliation of God, the exaltation of man, and the true witness of the God-man were the antidotes given in the one event of reconciliation, then that meant for Barth that the misery of humanity consists in its sin-sick pride, sloth, and falsehood. Thus Barth's theology, structured as it is around the objective reality of grace, has, by inner necessity, a fully developed doctrine of sin.

2. The act of holiness - the separateness which distinguishes itself in the bridging of separation - is the event of God's grace in Jesus Christ. And where this overcoming is actualized, persons become a part of this holy act. In other words, when divine-human fellowship is created, persons are set in the sphere of God's holiness. They are made members of the body of Christ. Given a share in his being, they are made holy. This means, therefore,

that because their 'life is hid with Christ,'<sup>955</sup> their present, past, and future are with the One 'who is and who was and who is to come.'<sup>956</sup> The future which they await is not an idealized eschaton, nor even one abstracted from certain 'tendencies' in the Christ event. Their future is the future of the Coming One. Even as he is their present source of life, so his future parousia will be their future life. And thus it was necessary to part company with Moltmann when he tends to project from the 'inner tendency' of the Christ event a future abstracted from the concrete person of Jesus Christ himself.

With reference to this concern, it again appears as if Barth has more adequately maintained this view of the future as the future of Christ himself. Moltmann was correct when he interpreted Barth's view of the eschaton as the noetic unveiling of what has already been accomplished in Christ,<sup>957</sup> but he erred in criticizing and rejecting this position. For if something 'new' is to take place - that is, something that has not taken place (even partially) in Christ - then are we not forced to look beyond Christ toward a future which, for all its projected ideals, is clouded by vague uncertainty? If we do this, have we not let slip the fact that our being is in Christ, and that our future is simply his future? By contending for the eschatological determination of essence, has not Moltmann come dangerously close to substituting the future for Christ as the source of the Church's being?

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955 Col. 3:3.

956 Rev. 1:8.

957 Moltmann, TH, p.46.

There is no doubt that Moltmann was anxious to preserve the dynamic of a history moving toward an open future in hope and expectation, and felt that Barth's 'epiphany of the eternal present' caused the moving wheels of time and events to come to a screeching halt. But we should be clear about what is involved in Barth's noetic unveiling of what already is in Christ. It means nothing less than this: the final victory of Jesus Christ over evil; the recognition of his lordship by all humanity; the time when every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord'<sup>958</sup>; the full actualization of his reign of grace wherein shall be the peace and justice so sadly lacking in the affairs of the present. Will this be a new future? The answer to that is both 'yes' and 'no.' Certainly it will be new in the sense that it will be the fulfilled actualization of Christ's lordship, but it will be nothing other than the unveiling of what is in fact a present reality - though hidden from our eyes. Our hope is not in the future, but in Christ, in whom is the future, as well as the past and present.

d. While it may be granted that Barth has 1) more faithfully dealt with the reality of sin than Pannenberg, 2) provided a more Christocentric vision of the future than Moltmann, and thus has 3) offered us theological alternatives to the problems which led Pannenberg and Moltmann to a universalism that resulted

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958 Phil. 2:10-11.



in the loss of ontological distinction between the Church and the world, is it not possible that Barth himself is nevertheless guilty of his own brand of universalism, so that in the end the effect is the same? For if Jesus Christ has accomplished the reconciliation of the world to God by his gracious justification, reconciliation, and calling of all humanity, have not all meaningful distinctions between the Church and the world been swept away?

The major criticisms levelled against the theology of Karl Barth have tended to cluster around four inter-related points. He has been charged with universalism, with being a-historical, with failing to take evil seriously, and with denying a place for concrete, personal sanctification in the individual.

1. The critics who argue that Barth's theology leads to the notion of apokatastasis are not unaware that Barth has explicitly refused to endorse the doctrine of universal redemption.<sup>959</sup> Rather, their contention is that Barth's theology as a whole leads to this end, in spite of what he says directly about it. Thus Berkouwer:

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959 Barth's position is that we cannot doctrinally assert an apokatastasis. 'No such postulate can be made even though we appeal to the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Even though theological consistency might seem to lead our thoughts and utterances clearly in this direction, we must not arrogate to ourselves that which can be given and received only as a free gift.' Nevertheless, Barth does not see any reason why we should not be open to the possibility of universal reconciliation, 'to hope and pray cautiously and yet distinctly that, in spite of everything which may seem quite conclusively to proclaim the opposite, His compassion should not fail . . . ' (Barth, CD IV/3, p.478).

'There is no alternative to concluding that Barth's refusal to accept the apokatastasis cannot be harmonized with the fundamental structure of his doctrine of election.'<sup>960</sup> Indeed, given Barth's emphasis on the objective work of grace in Jesus Christ, it is not difficult to compile a long list of quotations from any volume of the CHURCH DOGMATICS to support this charge.

2. What some see as the reason for Barth's universalism is the more profound problem that his theology is unhistorical. Helmut Thielicke puts it this way:

In any case it is not clear, if one follows the thrust of his teaching, how Barth can escape the doctrine of apokatastasis. On the other hand, it is understandable why Barth does all he can to avoid this conclusion - though the avoidance takes more the form of a simple desire to steer clear of it than of reasoned argument for doing so. The reason is that to expose the universalist thesis would be to confess openly the non-historical cycle. It would be an admission that the history of salvation does not consist of events and turning points and divine resolves, but involves only some noetically significant demonstrations of primal facts, and hence an intratrinitarian circle. 961

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960 Berkouwer, THE TRIUMPH OF GRACE IN THE THEOLOGY OF KARL BARTH, p.116. See also Brunner, THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF GOD: DOGMATICS - Vol.I, pp.348-52; Lewis, 'The Experience of Grace - The Problem of Sanctification in Contemporary Systematic Theology,' p.150; Colm O'Grady, THE CHURCH IN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY: DIALOGUE WITH KARL BARTH (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1969), p.30; Prenter, 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer And Karl Barth's Positivism of Revelation,' WORLD COME OF AGE, ed. Ronald Gregor Smith, pp.93-130; Helmut Thielicke, THEOLOGICAL ETHICS - Vol.I, ed. William H. Lazareth, (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968), p.116; von Balthasar, THE THEOLOGY OF KARL BARTH, p.163; Zahrnt, THE QUESTION OF GOD, p.109.

961 Thielicke, THEOLOGICAL ETHICS - Vol.I, p.116.

By establishing the event of salvation on a 'primal perfect,'

Barth has deprived the event of genuine historicity.

Nothing remains but a play of waves over the timeless deep. Gone is the tension-packed commerce between God and the world (which nonetheless still has 'its ruler of this world!'). All that remains is a mere monologue of God with himself. The result is that everything is subject - and here finally is the 'slogan' - to a dominant Christomonism. 962

As Zahrnt sees it, 'the basic fault of the whole of Barth's theology is that it is unhistorical.'<sup>963</sup>

3. This alleged de-historicizing of the relationship between God and the world has resulted according to some, in the failure to take evil seriously. If all has already been decided in a 'primal perfect' intratrinitarian event, then the conflict with evil can only be a mock battle. Thus Wingren interprets Barth like this:

The essential point is that evil is not a power opposed to God which God in a new act defeats on the last day. There are no new acts or events to be expected. Everything has already taken place. What we lack is insight. There is no evil power standing side by side with the kingdom of God, even though it may appear so to our blinded eyes. Revelation tells us that this is an illusion. 964

4. Finally, the eternal, a-historical salvation which some perceive in Barth's theology has been criticized as allowing no place for human transformation. His salvation is seen as so 'high-flying' that it never really touches down on the soil of

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962 Ibid., p.115. For a very similar view, see Zahrnt, THE QUESTION OF GOD, pp.112-13.

963 Ibid., p.107.

964 Wingren, THEOLOGY IN CONFLICT, pp.37-38. See also Berkouwer, THE TRIUMPH OF GRACE IN THE THEOLOGY OF KARL BARTH, p.232.

human experience. Alan Lewis contends that

Barth's is not a transformation to be experienced . . . . For the new, real person of the Christian is Christ himself, the eternally elect substitute. It is not a historical reality, which delivers some men and women from brokenness and sin, but not others, as they choose in the particularity of their personal histories to surrender to grace or to resist it. Rather, it is a universal, eternal identity, which pertains to all humanity by virtue of our being created and elected in Christ, and superseding all anthropological differentia and personal decisions. 965

e. There are two important facts about Barth's theology which must be stressed in the face of these criticisms. First, whatever Barth may eventually say about the triune being of God and his free, sovereign electing grace, he takes as his starting point, not a philosophical principle, nor a heavenly speculation, nor an abstract theology of the divine, but an event. It is difficult to see how the argument that Barth's theology is un-historical can be sustained, for if ever there was a theology which endeavoured to think through the implications of an event in historical space and time, it is Barth's. Theology, for Barth, is rational reflection on the Word - a Word which has given itself to our apprehension by becoming flesh and dwelling among us.

We know about God only if we are witnesses - however distantly and modestly - of His act. And we speak about God only as we can do so - however deficiently - as those who proclaim His act. 'God with us' as it occurs at the heart of

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965 Lewis, 'The Experience of Grace - The Problem of Sanctification in Contemporary Systematic Theology,' p.303. See also James M. Gustafson, CHRIST AND THE MORAL LIFE (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p.96.

the Christian message is the attestation and report of the life and act of God as the One who is. 966

Barth's entire theological method is predicated on the premise that, to say anything at all about God, one must lay down all pre-conceptions, all heavenly speculations, all theories of divinity, and simply listen to the Word which has been spoken in the event of 'God with us' - the historical event of Jesus Christ. If Barth later affirms, for example, the objective, eternal election of all humanity in Jesus Christ, then it is because he believes this to be a necessary part of the knowledge given to us in the event of our space and time of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. 'To say "Jesus" is necessarily to say "history."' <sup>967</sup> In a letter (dated 30 December 1954) to Berkouwer about his book, THE TRIUMPH OF GRACE IN THE THEOLOGY OF KARL BARTH, Barth wrote:

I'm a bit startled at the title, THE TRIUMPH. . . Of course I use the word and still do. But it makes the whole thing seem so finished, which it isn't for me. THE FREEDOM . . . would have been better. And then instead of GRACE I would much have preferred . . . JESUS CHRIST. My intention, at any rate, has been that all my systematic theology should be as exact a development as possible of the significance of this 'name' (in the biblical sense of the term) and to that extent should be the telling of a story which develops through individual events - the story of a struggle, but a victorious one. 968

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966 Barth, CD IV/1, pp.6-7.

967 Barth, CD IV/3, p.179.

968 Busch, KARL BARTH, p.381.

As he tells this 'story' of Jesus Christ, Barth's aim is to avoid monism, in which God's grace is seen to have so thoroughly overwhelmed all opposition that evil is thought to be completely nullified and the conflict brushed aside as if of no real account, and dualism, in which God and evil co-exist in an opposing equilibrium, as though darkness really had the power to withstand the light. What he proposes as an alternative is a 'dynamic teleology.' The power of light, though superior to darkness, has so far not yet attained its goal, but is wrestling toward it, being opposed by the power of darkness, which, even though it is yielding the field in clear inferiority, is still present and active in its own restrictive way.

A history is here taking place; a drama is being enacted; a war waged to a successful conclusion. If from the first there can be no doubt as to the issue of the action, there can also be no doubt that there is an action, and that it is taking place, and can thus be described only in the form of narration. 969

The second point which must be raised against Barth's critics is that the reconciliation in Jesus Christ is both an objective and a subjective event. This fact is often lost sight of, perhaps because of the extraordinary clarity of Barth's witness to the extra nos character of grace. But Barth has not envisioned salvation in Christ as a self-enclosed fact soaring high above us. 'It is a living redemptive happening which takes place.'<sup>970</sup>

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969 Barth, CD IV/3, p.168.

970 Barth, CD IV/2, p.621.

The object and theme of theology and the content of the Christian message is neither a subjective nor an objective element in isolation. That is to say, it is neither an isolated man nor an isolated God, but God and man in their divinely established and effected encounter, the dealings of God and the Christian and of the Christian with God. 971

While Barth's theology may certainly be termed 'Christocentric,' it is clearly not 'Christomonistic.' That Barth's theology is vigorously trinitarian is because of its rootedness in the event of revelation in Jesus Christ; that is to say, by being strictly Christocentric, by focusing solely on Jesus Christ and thinking through the revelatory implications of this name, Barth became fully trinitarian. The unshakable axiom for his theological method is that God's revelation is identical with God's being. Thus for him the Trinity is the interpretation of both the event of revelation and the being of God. Revelation is 'God in unimpaired unity, who according to the biblical understanding of revelation is the revealing God and the event of revelation and its effect on man.'<sup>972</sup> Therefore, as the subject, predicate, and object of the revelatory event in Jesus Christ, God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This means that response to God's Word in Christ is no mere appendage to the body of his theology, but an essential element of its trinitarian structure. Revelation is not only the objective

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971 Barth, CD IV/3, p.498. Thus K  ng: ' . . . Barth has not ignored the anthropological aspect of grace . . . . Barth realizes that something actually occurs in man through grace; that it is man who is graced; that man is altered in his very being' (K  ng, JUSTIFICATION - THE DOCTRINE OF KARL BARTH AND A CATHOLIC REFLECTION, p.194).

972 Barth, CD I/1, p.299.



Word of God addressed to the world, but also the subjective response to it, 'its effect on man.'<sup>973</sup> Interpreters of Barth who criticize him because of his supposed lack of place for concrete human change have missed a very fundamental aspect of Barth's entire theological program. They have recognized his Christocentric emphasis, to be sure, but have overlooked that fact that this is the ground of a fully trinitarian framework. His 'christological concentration' leads to a full doctrine of God in the trinal unity of his being as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and therefore to both his objective work extra nos and his subjective work intra nos - the latter enclosed within the former. God's Word in Christ is an effective Word, and thus it creates a response to itself in the ones to whom it is addressed. This is the work of God the Holy Spirit - not another work of God apart from his work in Christ, but an intrinsic element of the one work of grace in Jesus Christ.

In Jesus Christ and in the power of his Spirit, therefore, there takes place not only the objective justification, sanctification, and vocation of humanity, but also the subjective response, namely, the gathering, upbuilding, and sending-out of the Church, and the creation of faith, love, and hope in the individual.

1. The Holy Spirit is 'the power in which Jesus Christ attests himself, attests himself effectively, creating in man response and obedience.'<sup>974</sup> Barth thus describes the Holy Spirit as Christ's

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973 'The objective and subjective realizations are but aspects of the one grace of reconciliation. While they must be distinguished, they must not be separated' (O'Grady, THE CHURCH IN THE THEOLOGY OF KARL BARTH, pp.241-42).

974 Barth, CD IV/1, p.648.



'awakening power.'<sup>975</sup> He is the power of Jesus Christ through which persons come to know of the reconciliation of the world which has taken place through the journey of the Son of God into the far country. By this knowledge, a fellowship is created; individuals are knit together to become the body of Jesus Christ. This community is 'the earthly-historical form of existence of Jesus Christ Himself.'<sup>976</sup> In the power of the Spirit, Jesus gathers unto himself a community in which he lives and gives concrete form to his existence in our space and time.

What distinguishes this community, the Church, is first of all a certain knowledge. This fellowship comes into being when the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of individuals to see what has happened for them in Jesus Christ. Here men and women know that they have been justified because the Judge has been judged in their place. Faith, for Barth, is a cognitive act; he describes it as acknowledgement, recognition, and confession.<sup>977</sup> It is 'the simple taking cognisance of the preceding being and work of Jesus Christ.'<sup>978</sup>

We would be mistaken, however, to infer from this that Barth has reduced the word 'faith' to the level of mere intellectual assent. This is how his position is sometimes interpreted.<sup>979</sup>

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975 Ibid.

976 Ibid., p.661.

977 German verbal forms: anerkennen, erkennen, and bekennen.

978 Barth, CD IV/1, p.758.

979 See e.g., Wingren, THEOLOGY IN CONFLICT.

What Barth means by faith is an acknowledgement that is obedient and compliant; a recognition which is an existential 'action and decision of the whole man,'<sup>980</sup> involving both mortificatio and vivificatio;<sup>981</sup> and confession before others of the grace in Jesus Christ.

Faith's knowledge is the proper human response to the Word of God revealed in Jesus Christ. The present time and space of humanity are given to it in order that it may offer this response.

Its purpose is obviously this - that God will not allow His last Word to be fully spoken or the consummation determined and accomplished and proclaimed by Him to take place in its final form until He has first heard a human response to it, a human Yes; until His grace has found its correspondence in the voice of human thanks from the depths of the world reconciled with Himself; until here and now, before the dawning of His eternal Sabbath, He has received praise from the heart of His human creation. 982

And this grateful response really does distinguish the Church from the rest of the world. Because it is, by the power of the Holy Spirit, granted faith and therewith constituted the body of Christ, the Church is made holy. This holiness is nothing other than 'the reflection of the holiness of Jesus Christ as its heavenly Head, falling upon it as He enters into and remains in fellowship with it by His Holy Spirit.'<sup>983</sup> The Church is holy because Jesus Christ constantly wills to bind himself to it.

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980 Barth, CD IV/1, p.766.

981 Ibid., p.769.

982 Ibid., p.737.

983 Ibid., p.686.

'He is always the Subject, the Lord, the Giver of the holiness of its action.'<sup>984</sup>

As regards the Church's relationship with the world, it is holy, and

holy means set apart, marked off, and therefore differentiated, singled out, taken (and set) on one side as a being which has its own origin and nature and meaning and direction - and all this with a final definitiveness, decisively, inviolably and unalterably, because it is God who does it. The term indicates the contradistinction of the Christian community to the surrounding world, and in particular to the other gatherings and societies which exist in the world. 985

The Church is holy, set apart from the world, by virtue of the fact that it has been gathered together by Jesus Christ in the power of his Spirit to offer the praise of faith, acknowledging, recognizing, and confessing before others the grace of God.

2. The Holy Spirit is the power in which Jesus Christ upbuilds his community, sanctifying his particular people in the world.<sup>986</sup> Christians are not only those who by faith know of their objective sanctification in the homecoming of the Son of Man; they also participate subjectively in this sanctification. The true man, Jesus Christ, actualizes their true humanity in them. This differentiates them from the world.<sup>987</sup> The saints are not perfected human beings, but 'disturbed sinners' whose sleep has been broken.<sup>988</sup>

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984 Ibid., p.694.

985 Ibid., p.685.

986 Barth, CD IV/2, p.522.

987 Ibid., p.524.

988 Ibid.

They have been given not only a new possibility, but a new actuality. They have been set free to respond in obedience to Jesus Christ's call to discipleship.<sup>989</sup> In the power of the Spirit, slothful sinners are awakened to a new life, set in motion, re-directed. This is the process of conversion.

Conversion means the turning on an axis . . . .  
The difference between the life of the one who is engaged in conversion and that of others is not that the former moves itself, but that it has an axis on which to turn. 990

As individuals are thus sanctified, given an axis at the centre of their beings and set in movement around it, the community of saints is thus built up. The living Lord Jesus Christ not only gathers the Church unto himself, but upbuilds it, sanctifying men and women and their human work.<sup>991</sup> This building up means integration. The community is knit together into a mutually dependent fellowship marked by love.<sup>992</sup> It is so integrated because it is united under the headship of Jesus Christ.

Barth does not hesitate to say that 'Jesus Christ is the community,' but adds that this does not mean that the community is Jesus Christ.

There can be no thought of the being of Jesus Christ enclosed in that of His community, or exhausted by it, as though it were a kind of predicate of this being. The truth is the very opposite. The being of the community is exhausted and enclosed in His. It is a being which is taken up and hidden in His, and absolutely determined and

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989 Ibid., pp.533-53.

990 Ibid., p.560.

991 Ibid., p.617.

992 Ibid., p.635.

governed by it. The being of the community is a predicate of His being. 993

Thus Barth speaks of Christ and the community as the totus Christus.<sup>994</sup>

Christ is not an isolated individual, but the Head of his whole body and all its members; 'He constitutes an indissoluble whole with those who are His.'<sup>995</sup> In this way he determines their being and action.

The hallmark of the Christians' new being and action is love. In this, Barth is simply restating the Lord's words, 'By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'<sup>996</sup> As they participate in the distinctiveness of Christ's being, Christians are those who are given the freedom and power to love. By this love for one another, the Church is integrated and thus built up.<sup>997</sup> When men and women are converted, that is, given a new direction in Jesus Christ, they are freed to love.

If faith is pure reception, love is self-giving.<sup>998</sup> To love one's neighbour means that (whether he likes him or not) the one

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993 Ibid., p.655.

994 Ibid., p.659.

995 Ibid., p.824.

996 Jn. 13:35.

997 Barth underscores the Johannine 'love for one another' with particular clarity and force. As he sees it, Christians are not called to love the world in general, but fellow Christians (see *ibid.*, pp.802ff). He bases this on the fact that the Christian loves in the power of God's love, and God's love is an electing love which discriminates and chooses. Thus the community is a 'closed circle' of fellow disciples who are united in their common love. One cannot help but wonder, however, if Barth would not have been on more solid ground if he had emphasized the other Johannine witness about love, namely, that 'God so loved the world.' This would have been more consistent with his theology as a whole - especially his doctrine of the electing love of God in Jesus Christ for all humanity (cf. CD II/2).

998 Barth, CD IV/2, p.730.

interposes himself for the other, making himself his guarantor and desiring nothing else but to be this.'<sup>999</sup> This is the meaning of biblical love - agape - and the essence of God's love for us in Jesus Christ.

In the power of the Holy Spirit Christians become free for this action of love; the life of the True Man is actualized within them.

As there can be no above without a below, no before without an after, so there can be no divine revelation without a human ministry of witness, no history of salvation between God and man without its reflection and repetition in a history between man and man. The one without the other would necessarily prove to be a mere mythology and illusion in the form of a 'positivism of revelation.' But its reflection and repetition can take place only as the men who are loved by God and love Him in return enjoy and make use of the freedom to love one another. 1000

3. The Holy Spirit is the power in which Jesus Christ calls men and women to his side to participate with him in the task of witnessing to the grace of God. Jesus Christ is not only the justifier and sanctifier of humanity; he is also the One who attests himself as such. As the living God-man, he proclaims the reconciliation of God and the world effected in the being and act of his person. And in this prophetic witness to his high priesthood and royal kingship, Jesus Christ effectively summons individuals to join the fellowship of his witnesses.

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<sup>999</sup> Ibid., p.819.

<sup>1000</sup> Ibid., p.818.

The call of Jesus Christ has been addressed to all humanity,<sup>1001</sup> but this objective event finds its subjective answer in the fact that in certain men and women an inner awakening takes place so that his prophetic Word is heard and acted upon. Why does Jesus Christ issue his call? 'The purpose of a man's vocation is that he should become a Christian, a homo christianus.<sup>1002</sup> By taking the word in its most obvious sense, Barth understands a Christian as one who belongs in a special way to Jesus Christ.<sup>1003</sup>

The one who is called by Him, and thus called by Him a child of God and made a brother or sister, is set in fellowship with Him in a way which seriously distinguishes though it does not separate him from other men. For this is something which happens to him but not to all. All are elected and ordained for fellowship with Jesus Christ. All move towards it. It is waiting for all. But it is one thing to be elected for it and another to be set in it. The latter is the distinctive thing which takes place in the calling of man and makes him a Christian. As certainly as this calling aims at his becoming and being a child of God, its goal is very simply but powerfully his fellowship with its source, i.e., with the One who calls him . . . . He calls them to Himself, to attachment to Himself as we have previously said, to fellowship with Himself. 1004

And if we ask further why it is that Christ calls men and women to his side, making them distinct from all others in the world - if we ask what it means concretely and in practice to be a Christian - then the answer Barth gives is that 'it is common

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1001 Barth, CD IV/3, p.491.

1002 Ibid., p.521.

1003 Ibid., p.526.

1004 Ibid., p.535.

to all the biblical accounts of calling that to be called means being given a task.<sup>1005</sup> What is this task?

It consists in the fact that with their whole being, action, inaction and conduct, and then by word and speech, they have to make a definite declaration to other men. The essence of their vocation is that God makes them His witnesses. 1006

Thus it is this task of witnessing which 'makes them what they are in distinction from all others',<sup>1007</sup>; they are given a share in Christ's prophetic work, the ministerium Verbi divini.

The community of Christ, therefore, is the communio vocatorum. In being set at the side of Christ, Christians are at the same time set in a human fellowship which exists in distinctive particularity in the world.

Its real distinction from and superiority to the world, is that it is elected and called to be a people alongside and with Jesus Christ and with a share in His self-declaration, that it is given to it to be appointed His witnesses, to be set in the service of the eternal Word of God spoken in Him, to be ordained to follow the Son of God incarnate in Him . . . . This is what makes it unique among all people. 1008

Yet this distinctiveness does not mean the Church is made autonomous in relation to the world, for 'the community of Jesus Christ is for the world.'<sup>1009</sup> 'This simply follows from the fact that the community has its basis and being in Jesus Christ.'<sup>1010</sup>

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1005 Ibid., p.573.

1006 Ibid., 575.

1007 Ibid., p.576.

1008 Ibid., p.729.

1009 Ibid., p.762.

1010 Ibid., p.763.



Inasmuch as Jesus Christ exists for the world, the Church, as it is called out of the world to be at his side, is genuinely called into it.<sup>1011</sup> It is given to the Church really to know the world as it is,<sup>1012</sup> to exist, not in conformity with the world, but in solidarity with it,<sup>1013</sup> and to live under obligation to the world.<sup>1014</sup> The Church's ministry on behalf of the world will take many different forms,<sup>1015</sup> but as it lives actively for the world it fulfils its task as witness to Jesus Christ.

This prophetic work of the totus Christus - Christ and the Church - is an ongoing process that is not yet complete, and thus the Christian life is marked by hope.<sup>1016</sup> Like faith and love, hope is the fruit of the Spirit's work in an individual's life. Even as the Christian believes in the One who came, and loves the One who is present, so also he hopes for the One who is coming.<sup>1017</sup> His hope itself is a witness, and thus a necessary aspect of his vocation.<sup>1018</sup> That a person is given the freedom to hope is because Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, has awakened him and joined him to the company of his witnesses. As a part of

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1011 Ibid., p.764.

1012 Ibid., p.769.

1013 Ibid., p.773.

1014 Ibid., p.776.

1015 Ibid., pp.854ff.

1016 Ibid., pp.902-42.

1017 Ibid., p.911.

1018 Ibid., p.933.

this fellowship - with Christ and his community - the Christian takes part in the ongoing task of witnessing to the One 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.'<sup>1019</sup>

According to Barth, then, the one work of God's grace in Jesus Christ has two sides to it: the objective and the subjective. The revelation of God includes the Word from God the Father, the event of its manifestation in the Son, and the human response to it in the power of the Holy Spirit. The objective Word of justification, sanctification, and vocation is answered subjectively by the gathering, upbuilding, and sending out of the community, and by the faith, love, and hope of the individual. This response sets the community of Christ apart from the world - a distinctiveness which, in virtue of the Church's participation in the being of Christ, is shown in its ministry of witness on behalf of the world.

f. With a final, brief glance over our shoulders at the theologies of Pannenberg and Moltmann, it is once again clear that Barth avoids some of the problematic tendencies found in their works. While Pannenberg's proclivity is to minimize the role of human response in favour of a holistic view which gravitates toward a totalitarianism of the future over all reality, Barth finds a necessary place for the human response, grounding it in his doctrine of revelation and its trinitarian implications. Barth

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1019 Rev. 1:8.

fully accounts for the world's sin, and the overcoming - both objective and subjective - of this brokenness. For Barth, all human beings are not swept up into one cycle of reality moving from the future toward the future, smooth and unbroken in universal uniformity; rather, in the power of the Holy Spirit certain persons are, by faith, set apart as those who have entered into the actualized sphere of God's grace in Jesus Christ. As Hans Küng described Barth's position,

faith really involves the creation of a new man, a new creation, and a being born again. The just man, despite the simul peccator, is ontologically different from the sinner. This clear teaching of Barth must not be overlooked. 1020

On the other hand, whereas Moltmann's theology tends to define the Church's essence according to an eschaton abstracted from the concrete person of Jesus Christ, Barth refuses to locate the being of the Church anywhere other than in Jesus Christ. Therefore, the Church's relationship with the world is not, for Barth as it is with Moltmann, determined eschatologically, but christologically. The Church is given a new being - alien to it but nonetheless its genuine possession - which ontologically distinguishes it from the rest of the world. In the power of the Holy Spirit, it is in Christ in a way the world is not; this is its distinctiveness.

The result is that Barth's ecclesiology is not marked by the functionalism evident with Pannenberg and Moltmann. It has already

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1020 Küng, JUSTIFICATION - THE DOCTRINE OF KARL BARTH AND A CATHOLIC REFLECTION, p.82.

been shown that their universalism had the effect of limiting the Church's distinctiveness to specific acts, as for example, witnessing to the coming kingdom. For them, the Church fulfils a certain functional role in the world, but since it has, in common with everything else, an eschatologically determined being, it is not ontologically distinct. For Barth, however, the Church has a new being in Christ. In him it is made holy, and that means it is set apart with a radical, uncompromising distinctiveness. And yet, this being of the Church is not merely a static 'otherness,' but a being-in-the-act of love and ministry for the world. In the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ gathers a Church unto himself as his body, builds it up through the integration of love, and, because it shares in his being, sends it into the world to be a witness with him in his ongoing prophetic task. By the giving of its life for the world, the Church bears witness to the fact that it is not of the world, but of him who sacrificed himself in the act of holy love.

So this then is the fellowship of the Holy: the Church in Jesus Christ. As the body of 'the Holy One,' the Church exists in his holy being and act; therein is its distinction from the world and its life for the world.

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At the outset of this theological venture, I indicated that behind it all was the question, Does it really make any essential difference whether one is a part of Christ's Church or not?

Clearly, the answer is, Yes! It matters because there exists between the Church and the world an ontological distinction grounded in the very distinction between God and the world. As the fellowship of those who, by faith, have been united together in Jesus Christ and empowered with his Spirit, the Church participates in the holiness of God. It is the grateful community of those who have gladly received the divine fellowship offered them in the great act of holiness. Not to trust the One who is distinguished by his unlimited, self-giving love, not to turn away from proud independence, is an unthinkable alternative. It is a choice as dangerous as it is absurd, for it means turning away from him who is 'the resurrection and the life.'

And yet, for all its distinctive uniqueness, the Church may not rest proudly in a safe position, withdrawn from the world, with fences strong and secure marking it out as the party of the pious in a world gone to hell. For what distinguishes it in this world is its holiness, its constant effort to break through the fences in order to be in and for the world. The Church's life in Christ is not one set on the serene heights above the world's storm and stress. To the extent that it shares in the being of Christ, it is forever descending into the valleys of care and human misery. It has no choice in this matter, for its life is hid with him who 'emptied himself, taking the form of a servant.' This is its holiness. This is its distinction.

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